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THE WING OF AZRAEL.

By the same Author.

WHOM NATURE LEADETH.

Three Vols.

ONE THAT WINS.

Two Vols.

&c. &c.

THE

Wing of Azrael.

BY

MONA CAIRD.

Yesterday, this Day's madness did prepare
To-morrow's Silence, Triumph or Despair.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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CONTENTS.

THE WING OF AZRAEL.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DANGEROUS ACQUAINTANCE.

WHEN Viola regained consciousness she was lying on her bed; Mrs. Barber, with a portentous array of *eau-de-cologne* and *sal-volatile* bottles, stood over her, looking unutterable woe.

She fell to rubbing Viola's hands, and to applying vast quantities of *eau-de-cologne* to her forehead.

"Well, I *am* glad to see you restored, ma'am! I thought you was dead and gone, that I did! Permit me to apply some more *eau-de-cologne*, just above the temples."

"Thank you, Mrs. Barber, not any more at present," said Viola, who was already sopping just above the temples, in consequence of the housekeeper's amiable enthusiasm. "If I might have a dry handkerchief,—the *eau-de-cologne* is running into my eyes."

"I expect the walk was too long for you," Mrs. Barber

continued—"on a hot day like this too. I never did think those long walks was quite conducive" (the word as she understood it being entirely self-contained).

Viola longed to lie back and rest and be silent, but Mrs. Barber talked on, till at last Philip and Geoffrey came up, and the housekeeper retired, in answer to a nod from Philip.

"All right now, Viola?" asked her brother.

"Yes, I am better," she said.

"Who do you think has been calling? Harry Lancaster! But we thought it well not to let you come down to see him. He was sorry to hear of your not being quite up to the mark."

"Oh!" She seemed but little moved.

"And he was very sorry to miss seeing you, and other things polite. I don't think he looks well. Are you going to get up again to-day?"

"Yes; I am all right now."

Viola dreaded that as soon as Geoffrey left, Philip would speak to her about her meeting with Harry. The house seemed to stifle her. She hurried out and away across the gardens to the cliffside-pathway leading to the beach. The sea was just growing calm with the sinking of the wind, and gleaming with the mellow tints of afternoon. There

was a whisper of spring in the air; little white clouds overhead were carrying the sweet message from land to land. In a few minutes Viola was on the lonely shore, the waters sweeping to her feet. She lay against a long wave-like ridge of pebbles which the tides had flung up to stem their own advance upon the land.

At times of strong excitement, human feeling is not simple but infinitely complex. Nothing is too trivial to consider, nothing is too alien to the central emotion. Viola lay watching the overlapping curves of the little waves which raced one another to the strand, watching the fretwork of foam spreading between ridge and ridge, and the brilliant reds and browns which the touch of water revealed in the "so-seeming virtuous" pebbles —like the unsuspected things which tears will summon forth in human hearts.

"Wave after wave for ten thousand years has furrowed the brown sand here;
Wave after wave, under clouds and stars, has cried in the dead shore's ear."

Thus for centuries, the sea had beaten, just as to-day, on the crumbling coast, and probably for centuries after would beat so; while the joy and the anguish of human souls came and passed away as the shadow of a cloud

over the sea, or as a tremor in some salt pool left by the resilient waves.

When the human being fully realises how utterly he is swallowed up and lost in the world of infinities, the moment is always vital and terrible, though it has been felt and described so many times before. The realisation seldom comes until, seeking in vain for help, the sufferer finds himself shouting to a deaf universe, and hears his own voice dismally echoing through its unending spaces.

Viola, who had hitherto been shielded by religious teaching from this conception, felt the horror of it come upon her to-day overpoweringly. There was pain, look which way she would—pain in her own little world of being, exquisite, unbearable; pain in the thought of the vast, soulless, indifferent universe,—a giant machine grinding on for ever, "without haste and without rest." Where were the previous morning's faith and peace? All gone, and in their place: doubt, hatred, disgust, wounded dignity, wounded affection, devouring anxiety, and over all a consciousness that this hot emotion mattered nothing and availed nothing; that presently the waves would be beating and retreating, with only the cliff and the gulls for audience. Religion spoke warningly, but the familiar voice was not heeded. Viola turned her face to the hard stones, and

broke into deep, silent, terrible sobbing. Some heart-string seemed to break with each sob.

So still she had lain there that the sea-gulls—cold-hearted birds!—came sweeping quite close to her and over her head.

At length the crisis of the passion came, the wave broke and passed on. There was one tight stifled cry, and then Viola, changing her attitude, fell into a sort of lethargy.

She was dimly conscious of the stirring wind and the unresting sea-sound, dimly conscious of the golden glow that began to light up the sky. The waves sounded hoarse and desperate. Deeper and deeper grew the blood-red stain upon the waters, and the land seemed to have caught fire. The swiftest cloud-streaks were overtaken and their cool white turned into gold.

At the wet wave-line upon the sands a figure, clad in sunset-red, was slowly strolling, stooping now and again with swift movement to snatch some feathery sea-weed from the tide. A large brown dog accompanied her, barking when she flung a pebble for him into the sea, that he might swim out in pretended search, to return and shake himself, and bound and bark again for another mimic errand.

The two figures worked their way gradually along the

shore. Viola, lying against the ridge of pebbles, presently opened her eyes and found the dog standing beside her, dripping from tail and legs and ears, and threatening at any moment to shake himself with vigour. But a voice recalled him. Viola started up; she felt as if she ought to rise and flee from it; it was the voice of a siren, luring from the ways of righteousness. She felt that instantly.

Sibella, turning to pick up a stone for her tyrannical dog, found herself face to face with Viola.

Both women coloured deeply, and for a moment there was silence.

"I beg your pardon for unknowingly disturbing you. I thought myself alone."

Sibella hesitated, coloured again, and then said almost shyly, "I have been very anxious for this meeting, Mrs. Dendraith. You observe this is not the first time I have seen you."

Viola, too excited and bewildered to know what she thought or felt, continued to gaze at her companion in silence. Perhaps Sibella saw or divined her feelings, for she sat quietly down on the shingle by her side and began to talk. She spoke without personal reference, but with a subtle implication of comradeship which touched Viola's loneliness, as the glow of the fireside is welcome to one

shivering and belated. Then, more fancifully, she spoke of the sea, of its perpetual variety, its endless range of expression and meaning. She went on to speak about the down country inland, contrasting it with the tame fields and pastures among which she had spent her childhood and her married life. Viola grew interested, and the more Sibella told her, the more breathlessly interested she became. There was a strange resemblance to her own experience in the story that Sibella told. She too had been strictly and watchfully brought up; she too had begun life with a store of "principles"—enough (Sibella said) to stock the Bench of Bishops.

Before half-an-hour had passed Viola was speaking as she had never before spoken to human being; her cheeks were flushed, her eyes burnt with excitement. The unwonted utterance had thrown a confused light upon her own emotions, while the comments of her companion, flinging brilliant cross-flashes, frightened and allured at the same time.

"But what do you mean? I don't understand; it turns things topsy-turvy," Viola cried, with a sort of terror-stricken excitement. She stretched out her arm as if trying to grasp again the bulwarks of her creed.

A firm, gentle hand was laid in hers.

"Don't be frightened to open your eyes and to use your reason. If the creeds of our youth are true they can bear the light. We have both been taught, as we imagined, to worship God. I fear that we have really been taught to worship the devil! We were trained to submission, to accept things as they are, to serve God by resignation—yes, even the resignation of our human dignity—whereat the devil laughs in his sleeve, and carries off the fruits of miserable lives to add to the riches of his kingdom."

"Oh! I can never believe so!" cried Viola.

"No; we are both well grounded," said Sibella, "but you are naturally more conscientious than I. The better the soil the richer the harvest for the devil. I always questioned and doubted, though from force of circumstances I obeyed. But there came a crisis in my life, and then I broke away. I don't say it is a success, but in refusing to submit to what was degrading I have at least rescued myself from the unbearable self-loathing which a woman"——

The speaker paused, as Viola drew in her breath sharply. Sibella laid her hand upon her arm.

"It is better to face things," she said gently. "You have not suffered quite alone; I told you in what circumstances my marriage took place; a mere child, brought up without knowledge of life, of my fellow-creatures, of

the very laws and customs which were to rule my destiny. Everything in my surroundings was untrue, unscientific, groundless, fabricated. In my cramped painful little world, there were a thousand invented crimes, a thousand invented tortures, and in the close motionless atmosphere, these things grew more monstrous and unwholesome every day. This process of education and subsequent marriage, through which so many sensitive girls are made to go, always reminds me of the torture that the Romans inflicted upon one of their generals who had offended them; they cut off his eyelids and then compelled him to sit in the blazing sun. I, having been worked up through years of training to a state of overwrought sensitiveness, was asked to give my hand in marriage to a man whom I scarcely knew, and for whom I cared nothing—a man who regarded women as his lawful prey, let them fill what position in life they might. The family was eager for an heir; to provide one, and afterwards to devote to him my whole life and energies, was to be my sacred duty and privilege"——

Viola gave a slight movement, and Sibella tightened the grasp of her hand.

"I, of course, did not understand all this: how could I? My pastors and masters had exhausted the Dictionary for terms to express the blessedness and the poetry of what

they called a woman's destiny. How was I, a bewildered girl knowing nothing of the world, trusting that my parents had my welfare at heart,—how was I to know that legalised insults and indignities were in store for me?"

"You must think wrongly of it!" Viola broke out. "It is God-ordained—don't take that belief from me or I shall go mad!"

"My poor girl, you have already lost that belief—I am not taking it from you."

Viola turned away, not denying. After a moment of silence she said, "Please go on; this has a terrible interest for me!"

"My parents must have known that the marriage was unsuitable, but they had brought up their daughter with the strictest and most admirable principles, and they trusted to *that* to keep things straight and the family honour (as they humorously called it) intact. As a rule the method answers; society is founded upon the success of such exploiting; but in my case it failed."

"I ought not to listen!" Viola murmured.

"You ought to listen and then to judge;" said Sibella. "The story is so painfully obvious, and yet nobody sees it or admits it, and so the hoary old hypocrisies are kept up, the threadbare cant which yet holds bravely together and

is thick enough still to hide the truth from our crops of fresh young victims as they spring up year after year."

Viola pushed back the hair from her brow in a sort of desperation.

"Most women," Sibella pursued, "spend their energies in making all these time-honoured iniquities possible and successful, encouraging the repetition of these profitable old crimes apparently for all eternity! The fortitude and goodness of the victims are relied upon—and not in vain—to ward off from their perpetrators the natural punishment. It is for the victims to pay the price of the iniquity and to make it socially successful, and this they must do and keep silence on pain of excommunication. If the fortitude breaks down, ah! then what a hue and cry! The woman is hunted, scorned, ruined; there is no mercy."

Sibella turned suddenly to her companion. "Are *you* going to make successful another of these old villainies? Are all women who come after you to be worse off, to be heavier-hearted, because of you?"

Viola half-rose, as if to leave her dangerous companion. But she did not go. "If you are right, Mrs. Lincoln, the best and noblest women I have known are all wrong. Their goodness and their suffering has been in vain."

"And so *are* the virtues and the martyrdoms of good

women in vain. That is why the devil finds our planet such a happy hunting-ground. I assure you he enjoys himself immensely. He is full of humour. What's that?"

There was a sound of footsteps over the shingle. She raised herself to look over the pebble-ridge.

"Is any one coming?" asked Sibella.

Viola had turned white. "My husband," she said.

"Oh!" Sibella's expression changed. "He will be angry at finding us together—I understand. It was my fault, if fault there be. Remain passive. Say as little as you can, and keep as much as possible your usual manner."

Philip raised his eyebrows slightly on seeing his wife's companion.

"Mrs. Lincoln! what fortunate star directed my steps towards this spot?"

"Then you are glad to see me here?" Sibella observed, looking up into his face with a singular smile.

"Do you throw a doubt upon my good taste?" he inquired.

"I cannot be guilty of that mistake since meeting your wife."

"I bow for us both," returned Philip. "I never can get my wife to bow for herself."

"She has an admirable model always before her eyes. I

am lost in admiration of your bows; I wish you had lived in the last century."

"Thanks," said Philip. "Your compliment is intoxicating."

"You would have been perfect in a minuet, Mr. Dendraith. We have none of that delightful dignity of movement in these days; stateliness and grace have died out."

"Pardon me"——

"Oh! this is *too* much!" laughed Sibella; "my worst enemies have never yet called me *stately!* Graceful?"—she pursed up her lips and raised her eyebrows—"perhaps; —I have studied that a little—but stately! I should die in the attempt."

"You do not leave a bewildered creature time to catalogue your attributes, Mrs. Lincoln; he can only think of you as a delightful and dazzling whole."

"I am glad you don't think me unfinished," said Sibella, dismissing the subject. "How glad I am to have made Mrs. Dendraith's acquaintance. One never really knows a man till one knows his wife. Mrs. Dendraith throws, unconsciously, a flood of light on your character — most becoming," she added.

Philip's lips looked rather tight about the corners, but he smiled, and said suavely, "It is very kind of you to

take my wife in hand, Mrs. Lincoln; to know you is a liberal education."

"You overwhelm me."

"If you stay much longer in this position, I fear the sea will do that," Philip returned. "Viola, my love, do you contemplate restoring the grace of your presence to my humble abode before nightfall?"

"I am ready to come now."

"Then my house will be a home once more," he said, drawing Viola away to the side farther from Sibella.

"Mrs. Lincoln, you will permit me to walk back with you."

"Thank you, no; I do not require an escort."

"Once more, then, let me express my deep gratitude for having interested yourself so kindly in my wife."

He looked Sibella full in the face as he said this, holding out his hand.

Laying hers in it, she returned the look point-blank, and replied, with a little smile and bend of the head, "Please don't thank me; I feel myself so unworthy. Though I am interested in all that concerns you, my interest in Mrs. Dendraith has arisen quite independently of any such sentiment, and thanks weigh heavy on my soul, as ill-gotten treasure. Once more good-bye!"

She turned with a significant bow and smile, called

her dog, and walked quietly away. A challenge had been tacitly given and accepted.

"Was this prearranged?" Philip asked.

"No, accidental."

"Perhaps you had other fish to fry," he suggested.

She did not answer.

"I need not observe that our fascinating friend is not fit society for you, my dear."

Although this had been Viola's own opinion until this afternoon, she flushed painfully.

"You must intimate politely but firmly that you feel obliged to forego the pleasure of her further acquaintance. Better avoid the shore in the afternoon, as she seems inclined to make it a promenade."

"What is she accused of?" asked Viola.

"A mere friskiness," returned Philip; "culminating in a trifling elopment, scarcely worth mentioning. Lancaster's bosom-friend, Elliott, was the happy man."

"Did she leave her husband to go with this man?"

"Well, no; she went away alone, but it is supposed that he followed her afterwards. Anyhow she did not break with him, as a prudent woman would have done in her slippery position. There was no divorce, of course, but her character is gone. No woman can associate with her

and keep her own in good feather. I wonder a young person of respectable instincts like you would be seen speaking to her. It must not happen again."

"What has become of—of the man?"

"Elliott? That is a delicate question, my dear. What does happen to men who run after other men's wives? Scripture is mute upon the subject. Elliott is now expiating his misdeeds in another, but, alas! I dare not affirm with confidence, a better world. Perchance he is doomed to a cycle of never-ending flirtation with his neighbours' wives, till he wishes he had never been born."

"He is dead?" said Viola.

"You are a trifle bold, my love, in your expression. Say, rather, he has departed; he has gone to another sphere; he is at rest. Of course the last is rather euphonious than instructive."

"Has any one a right to condemn Mrs. Lincoln when her sin is only conjectured?" asked Viola.

Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"Possibly not. I merely explain to you that to associate with her is to take the bloom off your own reputation, and I have no notion of possessing a wife in that bloomless condition. Now, I hope I have explained myself clearly, my dear. Not a breath, not a whisper shall go forth

against the woman to whom I have given my name. Take care that you do nothing to give rise to it. You will see nobody, man or woman, without my knowledge; you will make no acquaintance, man or woman, without my knowledge. You will receive no letter that is unseen by me. And now"—Philip held open the gate into the garden gallantly—"now to the home of which you are the sunbeam."

CHAPTER XXX.

A TOUGH BATTLE.

SIBELLA sat in a low chair before the fire, with a blotting-pad and writing materials on her knee. She had abandoned her ruddy-tinted gown, and wore a fashionably made dress of dark cloth, neatly braided. Mrs. Russel Courtenay herself would not have felt unhappy in the attire.

Several sheets of writing-paper lay on the table, each with the commencement of a letter abruptly abandoned. Sibella was now struggling with another letter, writing a few words between long intervals of gazing into the fire. She wrote to the end of the first page, and then, with an impatient movement, tore off the half-sheet, crumpled it in her hand, and threw it into the flames. The next few minutes were spent in sketching fabulous creatures on the edge of the blotting-pad, and writing under them the names of common domestic animals. Sibella appeared to devote herself heart and soul to this occupation, looking at her sketch from this side and from that, adding brightness to the eye

and spirit to the tail, by means of deeply considered touches. The being under which she traced the letters D. O. G. had a strange, square-looking jaw and an appalling grin; his tail when unfurled must have been available as a weapon at a distance of several yards, and along his backbone the hair stood up in a ridge, indicating a spirit sorely aggrieved. Facing this work of art was a creature of the panther order, thin and strong and agile, with a watchful eye and a look of stealthy swiftness. Under this image the artist wrote, somewhat inconsequently, "Philip Dendraith."

"DEAR MRS. DENDRAITH,—It will surprise, and, I fear, displease you to receive"——

"DEAR MRS. DENDRAITH,—Please believe I am actuated by a friendly spirit"——

"DEAR MRS. DENDRAITH,—Could you meet me to-morrow afternoon on the shore at three o'clock? I want very much to"——

Sibella pushed away the paper in despair, and supporting her chin on her hands, sat looking steadily into the fire.

The door-bell rang.

"Ah, if it were only that poor girl!"

Sibella gathered together her papers and awaited the announcement of her visitor. A maid brought in a card.

"The lady wished to know if you could see her, ma'am."

The shadow of a train of thought seemed to pass through Sibella's eyes in the second of silence that followed.

"I shall be glad to see Miss Lancaster."

Adrienne, looking rather pale, but very composed, was ushered into the room. Sibella had risen and bowed.

"I have to apologise for this intrusion"—— began Adrienne.

"Please don't apologise. Will you take a chair near the fire?"

"Thank you; I prefer to avoid it; the wind is sharp outside." Adrienne sat down, wondering if there were anything in her manner to show that her heart was beating so hard that she could scarcely draw her breath.

"I think it well to plunge into my business at once," she said, when Sibella had drawn her chair facing her visitor, and placed herself in a calm attitude of attention.

"Please do so."

"I came on behalf of my friend, Mrs. Dendraith."

"She has sent you?"

"Not exactly. Yesterday afternoon I called at her house, and found that she had just returned from a long interview with you on the beach. Mrs. Dendraith told me all that you had said to her."

Adrienne looked her hostess full in the face, as if she expected her to flinch from her righteous gaze.

"She told you all I said to her," Sibella repeated, with the gleam of a smile in her eyes; "and what did you think of it?"

Adrienne flushed with indignation.

"Since you ask me, Mrs. Lincoln, I must confess that I think it is the most extraordinary, the most unprincipled advice that I ever heard in my life. I listened to Mrs. Dendraith in incredulous amazement. I know that you have long been my brother's friend, and therefore I have hitherto felt ready to believe well of you"——

Sibella gave a little bow.

"But when I hear that you not only hold such views yourself, but actually try to poison with them the innocent mind of a young wife, then I feel"——

"That the innocent mind calls for your protection. I admire your championship and self-sacrifice; I fear this interview must be painful for you."

"I should have imagined that *you* might have felt it painful," said Adrienne, with a gasp.

"Oh no," returned Sibella politely; "not at all."

The visitor was silent for a moment, collecting her energies.

"I come here to-day to make an appeal to you, to rouse your sense of justice and mercy, to represent to you what a terrible injury you may do to that young wife. She is not happy, as a person of your penetration would quickly see. But she is supported by high principle. She is noble, she is self-sacrificing, she is pure; faith is her sheet-anchor, and I consider that any one who robs her of it, or shakes it by so much as a passing doubt, is guilty of a cruel, an accursed deed."

Adrienne paused, breathless with disgust and anger.

Mrs. Lincoln's steady look was full of judicial attention; her expression was almost sympathetic.

"I have believed," Adrienne went on, curbing her indignation, "I have always believed that no human being is wholly devoid of good."

"Not even such as I, Miss Lancaster?"

"Not if you will give the better impulses fair-play," Adrienne returned severely, at which the other smiled.

"Oh! Mrs. Lincoln, if you had seen that poor girl yesterday, as I saw her, you would not smile! It was terrible. She came to me entreating and imploring that I would make her believe again, that I would reconvince her of her own principles, and of the love of God. Everything seemed to have gone from her; and it is *you*, Mrs. Lincoln,

whom she has to thank for this! I wish you had seen her fling herself upon the sofa, crying that she could not endure to live; that she was lowered and humiliated for ever; that it was intolerable to be herself! Of course it is a very morbid idea, but I cannot get it out of her head."

"Ah," Sibella said, "to feel so is to endure the tortures of the damned."

"Are you quite heartless?" Adrienne said, bringing down her little clenched hand upon her knee. "Have you no pity, no forbearance? If you *must* have disciples, if you can't rest satisfied with flinging over every law of God and man on your own account, why, in the name of reason, must you pick out for your followers sensitive creatures who suffer in this dreadful way?"

"You care for this girl very sincerely, I think," said Sibella.

"I would do almost anything for her."

"It will surprise you when I say that I too would do almost anything for her."

"No, it does not surprise me; nothing that you might say or do could surprise me any further. A woman who dares to advise repudiation of the most sacred duty to one so pure and sweet as Viola Dendraith would hesitate at nothing!"

There was a pause.

"You do not even defend yourself," Adrienne exclaimed.

"Because, Miss Lancaster—to follow your example of limped sincerity—I do not see my way to make you understand."

Adrienne bowed.

"It is, then, owing to my inferior intelligence that I differ from you," she said. "I never before felt occasion to bless my stupidity."

"Then your experience has not at all resembled mine," Sibella answered. "*I* have blessed my stupidity again and again! When I am dead there will be found written on my heart, 'Blessed are the stupid, for they shall never be confounded.'"

Her eyes sparkled in spite of her cool manner; her words, quiet, swift to the point as hailstones, stung as they fell.

"Alas! you are *not* stupid, Miss Lancaster, if you will excuse my saying so."

"A compliment from *you*——" murmured Adrienne.

Sibella gave a shrug.

"A compliment from me is nevertheless worth having," she said.

"I can bear your good opinion of my intellect, but

for Heaven's sake don't tell me you approve of my principles!"

"I am not going to," Sibella answered, "for I don't."

They sat looking at one another for a second in silence.

"Am I to understand that you intend to pursue Mrs. Dendraith's acquaintance?" Adrienne at length asked.

"A question I scarcely feel called upon to answer," said Sibella; "but this I will say, that whatever seems to me best for your friend that I shall do."

"Perhaps you are not very well acquainted with her husband?" Adrienne suggested.

"I have had some opportunity of studying his character."

"If so, you know what it means to oppose him."

Sibella bent her head.

"And that he has absolutely forbidden his wife to meet you, or any one, without his knowledge?"

"Having appealed in vain to my better feelings, you now appeal to my fears," said Sibella. "Yes, I know all that."

"And you intend to measure your strength with his?"

"He having on his side nine-tenths of the law, to say nothing of his wife's conscience and the powerful alliance of highly principled friends!—it is madness, is it not?"

Adrienne looked at the speaker from head to foot.

She was slight, graceful, soft in outline and in attitude. Her pose was rather indolent, though there lay in it a subtle hint of large reserve force. Her face at this moment wore a peculiarly soft expression.

Adrienne felt interested; she was vaguely conscious of something incomprehensible in this unprincipled woman. Sibella must be inherently bad. If a character failed to catalogue itself under one's own familiar headings, there was nothing but badness to account for it,—unless, indeed, it were madness.

"Miss Lancaster," said Sibella, suddenly turning her eyes from the sea, "it is childish for you and me to sit here bandying words. That will not avail either of us, and we forget our sisterhood in foolish opposition."

Adrienne did not appear to care to acknowledge the sisterhood.

"But we *are* sisters," Sibella pursued, answering the unspoken thought; "we are separated only because we can't see clearly into one another's minds. That is all. It is only dimness of sight that holds us back. You think of opinions, things social and things of rule, of names and shadows, and you turn coldly away and deny our common nature which makes us sisters against our will. We stand

as the poles asunder; but that is only in words, believe me! We are one, we are human."

Sibella again turned her eyes seawards.

"We stand shivering between two eternities; we came out of the darkness, and we see the darkness waiting for us a little way ahead—such a little way! And we have to pick our steps among rough stones, and our feet bleed, and we try to roll some of the stones away! And they are too heavy for us, and we are lonely, and the Place of Stones where we toil is very bleak, and we cry out that we must have love and hope or we die. And love comes, and our hearts leap up, and every stone at our feet breaks into colour, and every wave and every dewdrop gleams. Then a cloud comes into the sky, and dims all the glory, and love goes away shivering; and with him go joy and sympathy and brotherhood hand in hand. But we yearn after him still, and we seek for him all our days. That is your story and mine. There is no real difference between them. Opinions, things of rule, haunt us like Phantoms, and we bend the knee to them, and let the incense that they swing before our faces mount to the brain and deaden it. And when, in our wanderings, we come across a fellow-struggler, the Phantoms crowd round us and shake him off, saying 'This creature is accursed; do not commune with

him; *us* he will not acknowledge. Touch him not, accost him not, he is no brother of yours;' and we pass on. But our hearts bleed and cry out for the love and the brotherhood that we turn from. We want it, we droop and pine for it; but the Phantoms assure us that all is well, and we try to crush down our longings, and march on obediently, Phantom-led, into the darkness."

Sibella paused for a moment, and then went on in a tone still sadder: "And each one has his life-struggle to go through, and death to face; each with his attendant Phantoms must pass from mystery into mystery. Believe me, only the Phantoms hold apart soul from soul."

There was a long silence.

At last Adrienne said, with a changed expression, "I suppose you will say that *I* am under the influence of my Phantoms?"

"As more or less we all are."

"Do *you* acknowledge to that?"

"I am under the influence of all things," Sibella replied, "no one more so."

Adrienne looked thoughtful, but after a moment she drew herself together.

"I think, Mrs. Lincoln, the differences between us have little to do with what you call Phantoms. They are very

real indeed. Our ideas seem to represent black and white, positive and negative, good and evil!"

Sibella made no reply. She took up, in evident absence of mind, the pen that lay beside her on the table, and began to trace outlines on a scrap of paper. A procession of grim but shadowy forms followed close upon the heels of a more substantial figure, and from every side troops of shadows crowded up out of the dimness in attitudes of command, or exhortation, or entreaty, or sadness. Far away was a range of high-peaked mountains, but the shadows were very near and loomed large, so that only now and then for a brief moment could the human being, so close beset, catch a glimpse of the eternal hills, and when he did so, the vision was so strange and new and startling, that he felt afraid, and thought that he had gone mad. Then the shadows bent down comfortingly and closed up their ranks, till the vision was forgotten.

Sibella looked up at last.

"Tell me," she said, "the doctrine that you hold, wherewith alone one can be saved."

"I am sorry that I can't put my ideas of what is pure and right into a nutshell," said Adrienne; "all I can say is, that they are very unlike yours. Am I to understand,

Mrs. Lincoln, that you intend to seriously attempt to lead Mrs. Dendraith to throw aside her duty, and repudiate the ties that she has formed?"

"That have been formed *for* her, let us say, for the sake of accuracy."

"Excuse me," said Adrienne, "in this country no woman can be forced to marry against her will."

Sibella shrugged her shoulders.

"Wide is the infernal kingdom, and perfect its form of government! You do not know the story of Mrs. Dendraith's girlhood and marriage?"

"Whatever her story may be, I cannot see that any hardships or any other person's fault can justify her in evading the simple laws of right and wrong, merely because they happen to press her rather closely."

"Nor do I see," returned Sibella, "that the daily unpunished sins of society against its women should continue to be expiated by their *victims* instead of their perpetrators, for ever and ever, Amen! The girl has suffered more in a couple of years than her amiable father could suffer in a lifetime. Let *him* suffer now; it is his turn."

"Then you would advise her to leave her husband and disgrace her family?"

"I have not yet said what I shall advise her to do."

"And her good devoted mother; is she not worthy to be considered?"

"Her good devoted mother sacrificed the girl open-eyed, in the name of all that is sacred. It is interesting to remember that—for instance—Druid priests used to cram great wicker images with young girls and children, and then set fire to them,—also in the name of all that is sacred!"

"What has this to do with what we are speaking of?"

"History repeats itself," said Sibella. "No doubt any interference with those sacrificial rites would have greatly pained a sincere and conscientious Druid; but I confess that I should quite cheerfully inflict upon him that pain, if I could thereby save the imageful of victims, even if he regarded his honour and the honour of his whole family for ever sullied!"

"You scoff, then, at family honour?"

"I confess," said Sibella, "that I am not very tender about the honour that nourishes itself on the fortitude, the pain and suffering of others."

"I fear that appeal to you will be in vain, Mrs. Lincoln. You fling over with a light heart, the creeds and the tradi-

tions of centuries, all that our forefathers have taught us, all that our mothers have prayed and suffered for. For my part, I am old-fashioned enough to believe that our ancestors may have been as wise as ourselves."

"That I never disputed," Sibella threw in.

"And I do not feel competent to decide anew for myself every question under the sun."

"A very creditable humility," said Sibella; "but if you regard it as presumptuous to reject the doctrines of your forefathers, you must possess a vast and varied store of opinions, for which you are very much to be envied,—especially if you succeed in keeping the peace among them."

Adrienne grew impatient.

"Of course I don't mean that I take every idea without exception."

"You take only those that please you. Then, after all, Miss Lancaster, I do not see that your humility so very much transcends mine."

Adrienne, who was accustomed to rule the not very brilliant conversational world of Upton, felt angry and bewildered. She had a complete and dignified confidence in her principles, an underlying satisfaction in her powers of insight, of language, and of judgment. To-day all these

seemed at fault. Sibella was, of course, profoundly mistaken, but it was not very easy to make the fact appear. Adrienne's cause, although that of Heaven, did not triumph as so righteous a cause ought to have triumphed. The usual comfort of the baffled advocate of Heaven was denied her, for Adrienne did not regard herself as weak in argument or retort; if, therefore, under her guardianship Heaven lost ground, the look-out for Heaven was very serious.

No one sooner than Adrienne would have laughed at the position thus boldly presented, but so mysterious are the workings of the mind, that all are capable of taking mental attitudes which the sense of humour would alone forbid, were it only summoned to the rescue.

"I fear I have not won you over to my views," said Adrienne; "therefore it seems useless to continue the interview; though I shall leave you with a heavy heart, as I feel that my poor friend has an insidious and a powerful enemy, just when she has most need of allies. I, at any rate, shall spare no effort to counteract your influence."

"A declaration of war?" asked Sibella, rising and going over to the fire.

"You leave me no alternative. I cannot stand by and see that girl disgrace herself, and every one connected with her. I consider not only Viola herself, but her people, especially her mother and father. If any disgrace were to befall his name, I know it would kill him."

"She must save his elms and his honour," said Sibella; "she has not frizzled in her wicker cage long enough to satisfy her friends."

"I entirely dispute the analogy between Viola's case and these Druidical sacrifices," said Adrienne.

"Therein also history repeats itself," returned Sibella.

Adrienne, who had half-risen, paused undecidedly. Something in Mrs. Lincoln's face made her go up to her as she stood leaning against the mantelpiece in a dejected attitude.

"I ask you to have pity, Mrs. Lincoln," said Adrienne. "I ask you—a woman—to help me to save this sister from the worst fate which the world has to offer. Never mind whether or not the world is justified in so punishing her; all that you need consider is, that it *does* so punish her, and that the punishment means *absolute ruin*. Think of it! a girl sheltered as Viola has been sheltered, accustomed to refined society"——

"Her father's, for instance," Mrs. Lincoln suggested.

"Accustomed to be protected from all slight or insult"——

"Her husband's, for example."

"To be cared for and saved from all offensiveness and vulgarity"——

"Mrs. Pellett's; Mrs. Russel Courtenay's"——

Adrienne paused reproachfully.

"Think of the fate of this girl—cut off from all her friends."

"Would all her friends desert her?"

Adrienne coloured. "A woman's good name must suffer if she remained her friend."

"Oh!" said Sibella shortly, "go on."

"Then, to be practical, what can she do? Where could she go to? What would she live upon? It makes me shiver to think of it! She could not go into a family and teach. Who would take a governess who had run away from her husband? And what else offers itself to a woman of Viola's training? Have you considered all this? Have you really thought what you are doing?"

"Miss Lancaster, I can only reply that I have your friend's welfare at heart fully as much as you have, and that I have thought of everything. Myself and all that I possess will be at her service. We have each of us to act

as we think best, since we fail to convince one another. As long as I live, Mrs. Dendraith has at least one devoted friend who will never desert her."

And with that assurance Adrienne had to be content. She left Mrs. Lincoln with an uncomfortable sense of failure, and walked home vividly thinking.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SHIRT OF NESSUS.

To die, to be unconscious! The longing for it was like a gnawing hunger in the soul. To be mercifully wafted away into a great silence, where there was no heartache, no passions to struggle against, no indignity! Whatsoever Viola's lips uttered as she knelt in prayer, that was the cry of her heart.

The day arrived for dining at Clevedon, a day to which Viola had looked forward with uneasy joy mingled with dread. Harry would be there! Her nerves quivered; she felt as if she were visibly trembling. The evening found her worn-out and haggard with excitement.

"Viola, you have been out so little since our marriage that your wedding-dress must be quite fresh still, especially as you never put it on—in consequence, it would seem, of my having once admired it. I should like you to wear it to-night, and also the diamonds I gave you, which you also appear to despise."

White gown and diamonds were awaiting her when the hour for dressing arrived. The dress lay gleaming on the sofa; the diamonds on the toilet-table. Anything that symbolised her marriage, she shrank from touching as if it had been fire. And to-night she must array herself in that glistening garment, feel it clinging to her like a shirt of Nessus, close and firm, burning, burning——

"You look well," said Philip critically, when his wife appeared in her glistening satin and soft lace, "and the diamonds are very becoming. But you are pale—however, that is pardonable with dark hair. You wear no flowers. Is that from design?"

She looked down at herself.

"You want that finishing touch," said Philip. He went off and brought some azaleas from the conservatory. "Here is the very thing, a spray for the dress and a spray for the hair."

He advanced to arrange them for her, but she drew back, scarcely perceptibly, and held out her hands for the flowers.

"Thank you."

Philip turned on his heel, walked over to the other end of the room, and laid them quietly on the fire.

"If you won't take your adornments from me, you can go without. You certainly have a habit of straining at a

gnat, my love, having swallowed the camel." He laughed, looking her in the face, with an expression that made her sick with fury.

The delicate azalea petals were shrivelling as he spoke, helpless in the savage hunger of the flames. The sight was full of parables.

The eyes of husband and wife met.

"Have you not learnt wisdom?" he asked. "Are you always going to play the *rôle* of obstinate child?"

"I am as I was made and as I was taught!" she exclaimed. "I can't adapt myself,—I can't alter myself,—I am helpless. Things are too much for me; I cannot bear it!"

She walked to the window, repressing the blinding tears that welled into her eyes.

"My dear, you choose your time for a scene admirably. I hear the carriage just coming round."

Viola was struggling for composure, and dared not trust herself to speak.

"Sulky!" he said, with a shrug of the shoulders. "That, I hope, will give way before we join your aunt and her guests. Come, I hear Cupid on his way to announce the carriage. In his presence, at least, don't be emotional, I pray."

The butler (or Cupid, as Philip called him) entered at the auspicious moment, and found the husband helping the wife on with her cloak. Cupid thought his air was most devoted, but to Viola the act seemed like an assertion of right, the signal of victory, a careless victory, as if he had overcome the will of a tiresome child.

Her eyes were quite dry as she took her place beside her husband. He glanced at her, and seeing that she was calm, settled himself in his corner with a satisfied air.

The irreproachable little brougham trundled along over the bleak downs, its lamps sending in advance a flying shaft of light, chasing the darkness which closed up behind it, as waters close behind a moving ship.

Heine might have written a bitter little poem on that well-appointed equipage, with its sleek coachman, sleek horses, smart footman, moving daintily through the darkness, gliding discreetly across the wide solitudes, with their eternal sea-chant beating through the salt wind of the downs. The mysteries of nature, the mysteries of the Human, confronted one another cynically.

Perhaps, after all, a well-appointed brougham and a creditable coachman are matters as deeply mysterious, in their way, as any we find to ponder upon under heaven.

When presently Clevedon came in sight Viola's heart

gave a throb. Harry's face rose up before her and his voice sounded in her ear.

The shuttles of her fate were flying fast and furious! Would she have strength to get through the evening, with this iron hand clutching her heart and stopping its beating?

"Mr. and Mrs, Philip Dendraith."

The assembled guests in the drawing-room at Clevedon watched with interest the entry of the new-comers.

"Well, Viola dear, how are you?" said her aunt cordially. "Cold, I suppose, after your drive. Take that chair by the fire. Mrs. Featherstone, I think you know my niece—oh! yes, of course, you have exchanged calls. This other lady I need not introduce, I think."

The other lady was Mrs. Sedley, who had greeted her daughter with an anxious glance at her pale cheeks.

"Mr. and Mrs. Russel Courtenay."

Arabella was resplendent to-night. She entered, with some vivacious remark on her lips, slightly inconsequent perhaps, but very sparkling. She then serpentined round the room, with arching neck, recognising her friends and emitting exclamations of joy and surprise.

"And Mrs. Sedley! I am *so* glad to see you again; it seemed as if we were never to meet. And dear Mrs.

Dendraith here I am glad to see. I am so deeply interested in your daughter, you know; I have made myself quite a nuisance in calling on her so often."

Mrs. Sedley gravely felt sure to the contrary.

"Ask Mrs. Dendraith and she will tell you how I have pestered her," said Arabella. "She is looking rather pale to-night, but the white dress—her wedding-gown, I see, so prettily altered to the fashion—becomes her admirably."

(It clasped her close, burning, burning——)

"What a lot of people there are here to-night! Augusta told me she was going to ask the whole county. I see that delicious Bob Hunter in the other room, and the Pelletts, and the Evans party"—— Arabella looked all round curiously. "Of course, Sir Philip and Lady Dendraith will be here. Ah! yes, there they come. Oh! do look how Mr. Sedley is devoting himself to Miss Featherstone; I should be quite jealous if I were you! I always keep a watchful eye on *my* husband; I find it is quite necessary; men are all alike in that way"—Arabella laughed—"and I don't think we should care for them much if they weren't a *little*, just a little bit—don't you know——?"

"Mrs. Dixie, Miss Lancaster and Mr. Lancaster," announced the butler.

"Then you don't care for hunting, Mrs. Dendraith?"

"Hunting; no—I—not hunting,—I don't care for hunting,—very much."

Mrs. Dixie entered the room looking like a schooner in full sail. With her healthy-looking ancestor still at her throat, and a large proportion of the jewellery that had been saved from the wreck mustered upon her person and overflowing onto the person of Adrienne, who followed, the old lady swept forward, with head held very high, yet graciously. Viola presently found herself shaken by the hand and talked to about something that she did not comprehend, and then she became aware that Adrienne was speaking to her, and there was a sort of whirl in the air and a flicker of the candle-light,—and the next moment her hand was in Harry Lancaster's. And she felt nothing! no, she felt nothing, except this whirl in the air and this ebb and flow of light. Her hand might have been a block of wood. He was looking at her fixedly—holding her hand tightly in his. Presently she became conscious that he held it no longer.

She *did* feel something, then! something hot and desperate,—a leaping up of the heart, a wild yearning to feel that touch again! What was righteousness, duty, heaven or hell?—nothing, nothing! Be it right or wrong, she

cared only for one thing in the whole world, and for that she cared madly.

"Mrs. Dendraith, ahoy!"

From one end of the long room to the other Bob Hunter had half-skipped, half-skated across the floor, pulling up opposite to Viola. He then proceeded with perfect gravity to perform a few steps, fixing her intently with his eye and keeping his body steady, while his legs moved with extreme nimbleness.

He seemed to expect her to break into steps likewise, and she even began to fear that he would take her by the hand and insist upon her dancing, perhaps as a substitute for conversation. He knew that she did not understand that difficult art!

She saw Geoffrey on the broad grin, watching the little scene from the fireplace—Mrs. Dixie putting up her eye-glass to observe the conduct of her would-be son-in-law.

Adrienne, with flushed cheeks, stood beside her, trying to talk to an unwilling neighbour, who wanted to watch Bob Hunter.

That athlete came suddenly to rest, remarking that exercise was better than any tonic.

"Charmed to see you here to-night, Mrs. Dendraith—I

address you without ceremony, you see. Ceremony is the bane of genius."

"*You* ought to know, Mr. Hunter," said Arabella enchantingly.

Bob Hunter swung round and made her a bow. Then he swung back again to Viola and asked her what was the difference between a windmill and a Dutch cheese.

Viola blushed distractedly, and said she really had not the slightest idea. There lurked in her mind an uneasy fear that he thought of Arabella as the windmill!

"Oh! come now, this is weak," remonstrated young Hunter; "try and think."

"I can't guess riddles," cried Viola; "I never could."

"Use your intellect," urged the tormentor.

"I haven't got one!" exclaimed Viola in desperation, at which Bob gave a chuckle.

"This is becoming serious; I *must* have that riddle answered," and to Viola's intense relief he danced off to the other side of the room, going from group to group, asking what was the difference between a windmill and a Dutch cheese.

"My court-fool," said Lady Clevedon, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Adrienne gave a curious little movement and a spas-

modic smile. The vision of a warmly furnished room, with a view of sea through its long windows, was before her at that moment; of a dainty figure and a face with curving lips; she seemed to hear in turn quiet words of scorn and irony, words of sympathy, words of defiance. What would Sibella Lincoln think of a woman marrying Bob Hunter in order to be settled in life?

Adrienne frowned and tried to shake off the recollection. Had the woman whose character could not bear investigation actually been able to make Adrienne Lancaster feel her attitude towards Bob Hunter degrading? The idea of accepting his offer had not been regarded as quite out of the question. To sell herself was therefore not quite out of the question!

"Ah! Mr. Lancaster at last!" exclaimed Arabella; "the hero of the evening! I thought I was never to have a word with you; every one has been crowding round you so. Tell me, *is* it really nice to be a universal favourite?"

"I thought that *you* would have known all about that, Mrs. Courtenay."

"I? Oh dear no! quite an obscure person. I want to know whether you enjoy being a cynosure—don't you know?"

"A ——?"

"A cynosure of every eye."

"Depends painfully upon the eye, Mrs. Courtenay."

"Oh, you are horrid! You won't give a plain answer to a plain question."

"No; I give a plain answer to a beautiful person."

Mrs. Courtenay wriggled, and Adrienne looked at her brother in amazement. As Geoffrey said, Arabella would squeeze compliments out of a boot-jack!

"And now, Mr. Lancaster, come and sit down on this sofa, and tell me everything you have been doing since you left us all lamenting. You can't think how dead and alive Upton has been without you!"

"Indeed, Mrs. Courtenay, I can."

"Come, I can't have you conceited; that would be to spoil perfection."

"Am I to regard myself as perfection?"

"Oh no! for then you would no longer be perfect."

"As long as I continue to believe I have faults, I shall know that I remain faultless. It is worth crossing the Irish Channel to discover this."

"Now, no more badinage; I want to hear the serious truth about you. You don't seem in the least ill, Mr. Lancaster; I believe you are a fraud, and that you just got up a little scare to secure sympathy. Well, you have succeeded

in your wicked design: all the Upton ladies are prepared to protect and cherish you, and to insist upon your taking their medicines and going to their pet doctors. Won't that be nice?"

"Delicious!" said Harry.

"That sweet Mrs. Dendraith seemed quite concerned about you. By the way, do you know I have been envying her for getting the first sight of you after your return. She *was* highly favoured."

"I don't know exactly what you mean," said Harry, not without a feeling of suspicion and uneasiness. "I see her to-night for the first time."

"Oh, come, Mr. Lancaster, that won't do!" cried Arabella, laughing. "Why, I had it from her own lips! If you wanted to keep it dark you ought to have engaged her not to tell."

"I don't understand," said Harry.

"Well, let's go and ask her about it; she will explain."

"I don't think it's worth explaining; questions of date do not interest me."

"Oh! but this is more than a question of date," said Arabella meaningly.

But as Harry would not follow her to Viola, she had to content herself with asking how he thought her looking.

"Pretty well," he said.

"She is so very quiet, is she not? I sometimes fear she is not happy. Yet her husband is very nice, and handsome beyond expression."

The announcement of dinner sent people hunting for their appointed partners. Viola was allotted to Dick Evans; nearly opposite to her sat Geoffrey, radiantly happy by the side of Adrienne Lancaster, with whom he had fallen ridiculously and suddenly in love. Adrienne had been conducted to her place by Bob Hunter in his maddest humour. Viola saw that he was proposing to her at intervals during dinner, and poor Geoffrey's happiness fearfully diminished as he became aware of these untoward circumstances.

Harry Lancaster and his fate, Arabella, were also on the opposite side of the table; Mrs. Dixie had been introduced to an old gentleman called Bavage, whose name she caught imperfectly, but whom she at once declared she had met twenty years before, and so worked upon the feelings of Mr. Bavage that he too had recollections of that far-off divine event.

Now and then Viola caught sight of Harry in conversation with Miss Featherstone. Miss Featherstone was cold and calm and fashionable, and Viola found herself growing

more and more antipathetic towards the hard, handsome face. Loneliness was not a new sensation to her, but as she glanced round the table at the rows of polite faces, she thought that never in her life before had she felt so cut off from human help and fellowship.

Harry was there. Yes, but it might have been his ghost; he had neither look nor word for her now! Well, no matter! Nothing could matter any more. That was one comfort. Things had come to a climax; old faiths had been shaken, cherished principles held from childhood were growing dim; in thought she could sink no lower; heaven had drifted out of sight. She loved guiltily,—it had come to that!—and she loved in vain.

Viola caught the admiring eyes of her adorer, Dorothy, fixed upon her, and turned away her own with a sickening sense of shame and misery.

"O Dorothy, if you knew!"

Dick Evans was talkative. He told Viola all about some interesting excavations that were being made upon the barrows on the downs, and he wanted to know if she really wouldn't be persuaded to go for walks with him again. What was the objection? Did her husband think Dick would run away with her?

"Heaven knows!" said Viola.

"You look as if you wanted exercise," pursued Dick. "(I don't mean that you had better run away with me on that account.) You seem paler than you used to be."

"Do you think I am going to die?" she asked, with a little laugh.

"Oh no, no! Only you ought to be careful of yourself."

"What have I to be careful of?"

Dick looked at her. "What is the matter with you to-night? You are not like yourself."

That evening's conversation brought Dick to the conclusion that women are flighty sort of creatures, not to be counted upon or understood; that they don't quite know what they want; and if they do, by some strange perversity of nature, they refuse to take it when the chance comes. There was something not quite sane, he thought, about even the best of women.

A little farther down the table, sublimely ignorant of the many little dramas that were being acted around him, sat old Mr. Pellett who had been rapt, still warm, from his studies and brought, much against his will, to the festive gathering. He was in a state of absent-minded amiability, listening very humbly and a little bashfully to the remarks of a young lady of seventeen who was talking to him about lawn-tennis. Mr. Pellett, in Upton society, was a truly

pathetic figure. On her left, Viola had a grey-headed person who appreciated a good dinner and a young woman who forbore to nag him with trivial chatter during the sacred hour. She was therefore often at liberty to watch the others, and to busy herself with her own excited thoughts. Once or twice, looking up suddenly, she would find Harry's eyes fixed upon her as if he had been exerting, consciously or unconsciously, some subtle magnetic power. There was an expression in his face that set her heart beating furiously; he used to look so in the old days!

The next moment he was relating some anecdote to his neighbour which created a shout of laughter; Philip capped it with a second, and Mr. Sedley with a third; Bob Hunter bringing the series to a climax and setting the table in a roar.

Mrs. Sedley sat in her black dress gravely looking on, and wondering why every one was laughing. Her face was deadly white, and there were deep black borders under the eyes. She had told her husband before starting that she felt almost too unwell to accompany him to-night, but he had insisted on her coming, and as the painfulness of the ordeal induced her to regard it as a duty, she gave in. Once an intervening head was moved aside, and Viola caught sight of her mother's suffering face.

In an instant there was a rush of fear and shame at her own unholy thoughts. What unspeakable grief if that mother knew how the daughter had changed in these two short years! Was there nothing in this world for her but sorrow and disappointment? Her sons had caused her grief after grief, and her daughter——? Scarcely half-an-hour ago that daughter had been ready to fling over everything on earth for the sake of a passion which Marion Sedley's child ought not even to know the meaning of!

Roars of laughter awakened the echoes of the old dining-room; except Mrs. Sedley's, there was scarcely a grave face at the table. Her husband was talking about the peculiar attractions of widows, and their extreme fondness for the "dear departed."

"A man never knows how devoted his wife is to him till he dies," said Philip; "it must be sweet to die."

"Death is undoubtedly the great whitewasher," Harry asserted.

"Or the great endearer," suggested Adrienne.

"He that would be loved, let him make haste and die," said Harry.

"We shall all be loved some day! let us be thankful," cried Bob Hunter.

Dorothy Evans shook her head vigorously. Her brother saw that she had Mrs. Pellett in her eye.

"I am sure there are *some* people that one *couldn't* love even after they were dead!"

"My dear!" remonstrated Mrs. Pellett.

"Not if they died ten times over," said Dorothy with emphasis.

"My dear child, so unchristian!"

"Not if they didn't wake up at the sound of the last trumpet!" cried the young woman doggedly, piling up the agony. "You would feel everlastingly grateful to them for dying, but you could never love them—*never!*"

"Perhaps you don't know how to love, Dorothy," said Dick, with a half-warning smile.

"Oh, don't I!" Dorothy ejaculated, with a glance at Viola.

"Do you love *me*, Miss Dorothy?" inquired Philip indolently. "Man and wife are one, you know!"

"No, I don't," said Dorothy briefly.

"Would you love me if I were dead?"

"No."

"Can you imagine any circumstances in which you would entertain that feeling towards me?"

"Nobody ever loved anybody who asked questions," Dorothy retorted.

"I feel crushed," said Philip; "it is evidently time for me to die!"

"Then why don't you do it?" asked the ruthless one beneath her breath.

He caught the words and laughed.

"All in good time, cruel but fair one!" he said.

Mrs. Sedley, who was leaning back in her chair saying nothing, made a slight spasmodic movement, but no one noticed it.

"Don't talk of dying in that flippant manner," said Lady Clevedon; "it is uncanny."

When she gave the signal to the ladies, Mrs. Sedley rose with an effort and moved from the table giddily. She recovered herself, however, and passed into the drawing-room with the others.

Viola characteristically lingered behind, allowing more self-confident ladies to precede her, and, alas! by these tactics falling into the clutches of the watchful Mrs. Pellett, who took her by the arm encouragingly and led her out with the faintly rustling procession.

In the drawing-room every one drew round the fire and began to talk, chiefly of local matters and domestic details.

"You are not well to-night, Marion," said Lady Clevedon, leading her sister-in-law to a low chair.

"Not quite well," Mrs. Sedley confessed.

Viola had deserted Mrs. Pellett and was standing by her mother's side.

"It is nothing," said Mrs. Sedley, catching sight of Viola's anxious face.

"I often feel so—very often."

Viola tried to persuade her to go home at once.

"Oh dear no; your father would be annoyed. I shall get on all right—if you will hand me that bottle of smelling-salts."

Viola gave it, and repeated her persuasions, saying that she would return with her mother to the Manor.

But it was of no avail. Mrs. Sedley was determined to remain to the end.

"Only another hour and a half," she said, with a faint smile.

The other ladies, having discussed all local matters, were now engaged upon a recent scandal which had been making a stir in the fashionable world.

Viola was sitting apart, pale and exhausted with excitement.

"Oh, Mrs. Dendraith," cried Arabella, "you lost that anecdote! It is for your private ear—quite too shocking to relate in public."

"I fear it will be wasted on me," said Viola, shrinking back.

"Oh! you can't fail to enjoy it; it is really too good, isn't it, Miss Featherstone?"

Viola drew away quickly. "Please don't trouble, Mrs. Courtenay; I *hate* such stories!"

She said it with such a fierce vigour that there was an awkward silence among the ladies, the silence that always falls when any strong expression of opinion is given in society. Viola set her lips, as she played with the blade of a paper-knife, and felt a wild impulse to hurt physically these well-dressed complacent beings who seemed incapable of being hurt in any other way. It was incredible to her that women could be so vulgar and so ignoble.

Presently Bob Hunter appeared as a forerunner of his colleagues who were lingering over their wine. Viola's heart began to throb. Last of the train Harry Lancaster came into the room, and was immediately waylaid by Sir Philip and by Mrs. Featherstone. He seemed to be in a lively vein to-night, for wherever he went there was a stir and a burst of laughter.

Viola had to clutch her paper-knife very tightly to prevent herself from visibly trembling.

"Oh! Mr. Lancaster," Mrs. Courtenay was saying, "I

have heard such shocking things about you. I hope they aren't true."

"I hope not, I am sure," said Harry.

"I hear that you call upon this dreadful Mrs. Lincoln who has come to live here. (I tell Sir Philip it is encouraging immorality to let her rent his house.)"

"Clearly," said Harry, "any one who lets his house connives at the misdeeds of his tenant, past, present, and future."

"No; but really," urged Mrs. Featherstone, "I think it is so bad for the neighbourhood; I hope you haven't been weak enough to call upon her!"

"It is very kind of you to take so much interest in me," said Harry. "You can't imagine me frequenting any but the most irreproachable society, I hope? Are not *your* severe doors open to me?"

"Oh! I am not so particular about my *men*," retorted Mrs. Featherstone, with a laugh. "I used to know Mrs. Lincoln a little before the scandal: I can't imagine what she comes here for. The man she ran away with is dead, isn't he?"

At this moment Viola, who had been receiving the homage of Dorothy Evans, was sitting alone on a sofa, Dorothy being summoned by her mother to have her sash

re-arranged. As usual, it had worked itself round from the back to the front.

Harry managed to break away from Arabella, and went straight to the vacated seat.

"I thought I was never to have a word with you," he said, in a low, hurried voice. "There seems a fate against it."

Philip's eyes were resting on them, and they both felt it.

"I want to give you a letter presently. Don't start; look as if I were telling you that the weather in Ireland for the last month has been extremely changeable. The letter is from Mrs. Lincoln, not from me. You never in your life had a more sincere friend than she is. The shock-headed little girl who has just left you is equally sincere, but not a whit more so. Trust them both, and oh! Viola, do as Mrs. Lincoln asks you."

She raised her eyes for a moment. Suddenly her head swam; she grasped the back of the sofa, breathing quickly.

"What is in the letter?"

"There is no opportunity to tell you now: I shall be suspected—— Viola—one word, or sign"—Harry bent towards her, with his elbow on his knee, his hand half-hiding his face. "Drop your handkerchief for 'yes;' touch the lace on your dress for 'no.'"

There was a rustle of silk close beside them. Viola gave a gasp.

"However, we had plenty of gaiety," said Harry, in a conversational tone; "the Irish are a very hospitable people."

By this time Mrs. Pellett had passed on.

"Now for my question, Viola. Do you trust me? and will you do as Mrs. Lincoln asks you in this letter?"

She dropped her handkerchief, and Harry stooped to pick it up.

Mrs. Russel Courtenay was approaching.

"And Mr. Evans really is thinking of restoring his church? I hope they won't make the usual gaudy monstrosity of the old place."

Harry rose to yield his place to Arabella.

"Oh, please don't get up; you two looked so comfortable and happy there; I wouldn't disturb you for the world."

"Thank you. Well, we *were* very comfortable and happy, as you say," said Harry, who had become rather white, "but our joy would be still greater if Mrs. Courtenay would bestow upon us the light of her countenance."

"Flatterer, avaunt!" cried Arabella, glancing curiously at Viola's pale cheeks. "Mr. Lancaster," she said impressively, "I don't believe you!"

The two looked for a second in one another's eyes.

"Scepticism, Mrs. Courtenay, is the curse of the age."

"Oh! there are other curses besides scepticism," said Mrs. Courtenay. "Things are coming to a dreadful pass in society—people running away from their wives and husbands, and all that sort of thing. You know this case in all the papers—really it makes one wonder who *is* to be trusted; as if one might expect one's nearest and dearest to be in the divorce-court to-morrow! I am quite unhappy about it, really I am."

"That is very good of you," said Harry.

"You speak in riddles, Mr. Lancaster. Do you know" —(Arabella lowered her voice)—"Mrs. Dendraith got quite angry when we were discussing this divorce-case after dinner. She evidently dislikes the subject; she is so good and sweet, is she not?"

A pause.

"Don't you think so, Mr. Lancaster?" Arabella repeated.

"That follows from her sex," he said, with a sort of jaded politeness.

"Oh! will you never cease these flatteries?"

"England expects every man to do his duty."

"Mr. Lancaster, I don't think I like you to-night. I

believe you are tired of me, and want Mrs. Dendraith to yourself. Well, I will not detain you."

She looked into his eyes as she said it, and then swept away, leaving Harry watching her with an absorbed expression.

"She guesses," he said to himself. "Well, I have to play a game against the world—an Arabella more or less makes but little difference; one can't cheat these carrion crows of their natural food."

He returned to Viola, keeping a watchful eye upon Philip and Mrs. Courtenay. He began to talk about indifferent matters, and then, without change of attitude or manner, he said, "Will you take the letter?"

She looked at her mother. Harry bent closer.

"*Viola*," he repeated in a pleading tone.

She gave a sign of assent.

"I will put it into your hand as we say good-night; it is very small; be careful not to drop it. There are many suspicious eyes round us. Burn the letter as soon as you have read it."

"We are being watched," said Viola nervously.

"I will leave you," returned Harry; "but as soon as you find an opportunity go into the conservatory,—it is cool and pleasant; you are looking very tired."

He left her without further hint.

After a few minutes of bewildered struggle with herself, she rose and entered the conservatory. The cool green of the leaves and the sound of dripping water were grateful indeed to her tired nerves.

She sank into a low chair, and a sensation of languor crept over her, mind and body; a longing to give herself up to her fate, to resist and strive no longer.

Soft music crept in from the drawing-room; a gondolier's song, rhythmic and indolent.

Viola heaved a sigh, a deep long sigh and lay back among the cushions. The tears of pleasure and relief welled up under her closed eyelids.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DAUGHTER OF THE ENDLESS NIGHT.

THE music mercifully did not cease, and Viola lay there like a tired child resting.

It was no surprise to her when presently a figure stood by her side and a voice sounded in her ear. She did make one desperate effort to escape the danger of this interview, but Harry laid a hand upon her arm, and she was helpless. Indeed she was physically too exhausted to make any successful attempt to oppose his will.

"There is no time to lose," he said; "let me give you the letter while I have the chance. It is to ask you to meet Mrs. Lincoln at Caleb Foster's to-morrow. Caleb is a friend of Mrs. Lincoln, and he is absolutely trustworthy. Gossip is impossible to him. And now I want you to think deeply over our position. Everything depends on you. We—Sibella and I—are ready for all risks. But we can do nothing unless you help us."

"Why was I ever born?" she exclaimed.

"Don't despair," he said gently, taking her hand. "No one need despair who is loved as you are loved."

She turned away.

"Viola, be reasonable. My love for you before your marriage was as it now is, the homage of my whole being; it is of the real and lasting kind, and it is ready—it has shown itself ready for sacrifice."

She was passing her hands over her eyes to force back the tears of joy. He loved her still—her fears were all unfounded—the horrible loneliness was gone. The sense of wrong for the moment was drowned in the flood of joy and relief.

"I am not pleading now that you should return my love—though I passionately long for that—I want you to understand that you have at your service one who is ready to risk anything for you, but who would despise himself if he tried to build up a claim upon you through that service."

(Ah! if she might only tell him!)

"Nevertheless, I want you to reconsider your views on these questions, and to ask yourself if a true and passionate love *can* be a wrong to any woman. I want you to ask yourself if mere external circumstances can turn right into wrong in a breath. I know, and Viola, my darling, you *know*, that your husband's love for you is not as great

or as reverential as mine, and yet his is legitimate. Is this rational? Is this just? No, it is wrong, from beginning to end—accursedly, infernally wrong!"

He was kneeling beside her, clasping her hands, though she made a sort of spell-bound effort at resistance. Some instinct seemed to hint to him that his words no longer fell on stony ground. She shivered at his touch.

"Love is its own justification. Every one capable of real love *knows* that it is."

"If all believed that—ah! don't touch me—I can't think when you touch me—if all believed that, everything would fall into confusion."

He leant forward eagerly.

"And do you really think that society rests safe and sound upon its foundations of misery and martyred affection?"

"Oh! I don't know what to think or say. If your ideas are right, what becomes of purity and truth?"

He looked at her for a moment in mournful silence.

Sibella's words still rang in his ears: "Such a woman is foredoomed. We cannot save her." Was it true? He felt a gloomy foreboding that it was. The past seemed to be too strong for her, the attitude of feeling to be changelessly fixed, in spite of all the suffering she had endured.

"Adrienne says I ought to obey the call of duty, to regard myself as placed and dedicated for life. I am Philip's wife; I can't get out of that, can I? I can't get out of the obligations which it implies, however terrible they may be, except by shirking."

"Listen to me, Viola; if there is such a thing as justice, I say that no woman is morally bound to a man when she is married to him as *you* were married to your husband. You do no good to any one by submission. You only add to the anguish of other women in your own position, and of men in mine."

The words seemed full of the sophistry of passion; they made her heart beat, attracting, tempting, and at the same time repelling. Emotion, and the ingrained results of long training, were at variance. The heart stirred beneath its crust of acquired sentiment, but she felt as if she could curse the man and the woman who had disturbed that crust, and awakened her to new and more exquisite anguish.

Harry began to wonder whether, after all, it would not have been wiser to leave Viola with her convictions undisturbed. It seemed a hopeless task to free her from them so entirely that she would be ready for action. And without action it was worse than useless—so far as her own fate

was concerned—to see clearly. Just in proportion to the additional knowledge would the suffering increase.

"Viola," he said, "you make me fear that, after all, I have only added to your misfortunes instead of saving you."

She hesitated for a moment, then she shook her head.

"You have made me suffer, but you have saved me from suffering quite alone. Adrienne is good and kind, and a true friend, but oh! she does not know, she does not understand."

"If only I could take you in my arms and carry you away from all this misery, and comfort you and heal you as only the ministries of love *can* heal. Will you not come? I plead for something more than life."

"And I," said Viola, "have something more than life to defend."

"And how will you defend it? By remaining in your present position?"

"O Harry! you torture me."

He took her hand and kissed it.

"Viola, do you love me? You *do!* I know it!"

In a moment he had drawn her to him and laid her head close down upon his shoulder. She could not move without a strong effort, and she did not make the effort. She seemed half-stupefied. He stooped and kissed her on

the lips, and Viola knew that her fate, whatever it might be, was sealed.

"I was certain this would come some day, but it seems too wonderful to be true."

Two or three never-forgotten moments of silence passed, and then Viola said, with a sigh, "But, Harry, this can only bring unhappiness."

She tried to draw away, but he held her tightly.

"Don't talk to me of unhappiness when I hold you for the first time in my arms and know that you love me! You will come with me, Viola," he pleaded; "you will hesitate no longer!"

"Oh, let me go! let me go! You mesmerise me; you bewitch me. I did not mean to give way like this; I am light-headed; life is too hard for me—I can't cope with it—its temptations are terrible."

"Thank Heaven you feel them! Now it all seems plain to me. You will not sacrifice everything to mere prejudice any longer. You care for the *thing*, not the *name;* you care for the honour that the heart recognises, not the honour of the world. It may be good to suffer martyrdom, but your cause must be worth the cost. What *you* are asked to suffer for—though it counts its martyrs by the thousand—is not worthy of the sacrifice."

"But I have fears, so many fears," said Viola. "You want me to leave my husband. That means to disgrace my family."

"Who have deliberately sacrificed you to their worldly interests."

"My mother believed that she was acting for the best; and as for my father, he only did what hundreds of parents are doing every year."

"I think it is high time that the other hundreds had their eyes opened a little," muttered Harry.

"It would break my mother's heart," said Viola. "I *cannot* do it; it is impossible! And my father—my brother"——

"Viola!" he pleaded, taking her hand and drawing her towards him, "you think of everybody except the one person who loves you more than all the rest put together—a thousand times more. It would break my heart to lose you and to know of your wretchedness, but you never think of that. Perhaps if I had destroyed the happiness of your childhood and handed you over to a misery for life, you might have been careful about *my* heart too. As it is, I suppose I must expect always to come last."

"O Harry! you know I am struggling with temptation,

struggling to do right—but all these ideas are so new to me, so appalling!"

"I suppose it would surprise you to hear that to me the *old* ideas are appalling."

"I see their hideousness, and how awful it is to be a woman—yet"——

"Then why will you not act? Sibella and I are pledged to support you and protect you through thick and thin."

"I understand that; you are both far too generous and too good to me. Give her back her letter, Harry; tell her I thank her with all my heart, but—but it's of no use. I am beyond help. Why should you both trouble to rescue a vacillating, foolish woman who has not the strength of mind either to submit silently to her fate, or to break free from it boldly?"

"We do it because we love her," said Harry. "Will she not make us happy by consenting to put herself in our faithful hands?"

Viola shook her head.

"I dare not—I dare not—for my mother's sake. I don't fear anything for myself, but for her—no, I dare not."

"Is that your sole reason."

"I only know that while she lives I must endure it as

best I may. I *cannot* deal her such a crushing blow! She would die, indeed she would!"

As the last words were uttered Adrienne entered the conservatory hastily.

"Viola dear," she said, "will you come with me? Your mother is going home. She feels unwell, and wishes you to know."

"Unwell!" Viola turned pale and hastened away.

"I am afraid it's serious," Adrienne said in a low voice to her brother as she passed out.

Mrs. Sedley was lying on a sofa in her sister-in-law's boudoir, whence Lady Clevedon had banished every one but Adrienne and her own maid.

"What is it? What is it?" cried Viola.

"I think it is a bad faint," said her aunt; "she is much better now."

Mrs. Sedley was struggling as if for breath.

"Take me home, Viola," she gasped.

"I don't think you ought to be moved till you are better, Marion," said Lady Clevedon.

Mrs. Sedley's brows contracted painfully.

"Take me home," she repeated.

"Very well; you shall go if you wish it. Gibson, will you go and ask Mrs. Sedley's coachman to get his horses

in as soon as he possibly can? and tell James to ride over and ask the doctor to go at once to the Manor-House."

Before the carriage arrived Mrs. Sedley seemed a little better, so that when her husband came in to know what in the world was the matter she was just able to answer cheerfully that it was only a fainting-fit, and that she was almost well again now.

"I am sorry to hurry you away, but I am so afraid of being laid up away from home. If Philip will allow her, Viola is coming back with me."

Adrienne had gone to tell Philip what had happened, and she returned with a gracious message of permission to Viola to accompany her mother home. Adrienne laid an accent on the word *permission*, as implying a right and dutiful spirit on the part of Viola, and commendable relations between the husband and wife.

The stars were all ablaze as the ramshackle old vehicle trundled homewards across the downs. Mrs. Sedley lay back with closed eyes, Viola beside her, while Mr. Sedley and Geoffrey sat opposite, occasionally speaking in undertones. Mr. Sedley had begun with his usual bawl, but on Viola's remonstrance he had reduced himself to a hoarse whisper.

One of the windows was open, admitting breaths of soft air, imbued with the marvellous sweetness of spring.

Holding her mother's hand Viola sat looking out into the night. Creeds, doctrines, social laws, all seemed to lose form and substance in that wild darkness; they trembled and waned when brought thus face to face with nature, face to face with the inexorable facts and the unutterable sadness of life.

Harry was right; these stars, this darkness, that unappeasable sea, confirmed him; this pain, this failure and disappointment, confirmed him. He pinned his faith to realities, and he flung conventions to the winds. He would have *things*, not names; only people who build their faith on "common-sense" were mad enough to lay down their lives for the sake of words and phrases, to bid farewell to love, happiness, all the best and sweetest things of life, at the bidding of a shadow.

Viola shivered with foreboding. In the dim starlight all the occupants of the carriage looked strange and white, but her mother's face was ghastly.

Death seemed to be already of the party. They could feel his presence among them. The pain-stricken, toilsome, joyless existence was nearing its end. It might be a matter of months, or of weeks, but the end was in sight.

The brutal pitiless demon of human destiny was about to put his last touch to the ugly work. And now to Viola, for the first time since her marriage Death seemed awful instead of beneficent. For the first time, almost in his very presence, her heart rose in passionate anger against him and his clumsy solution of the human problem: destruction in default of cure. A vision of the glory and splendour of life had been given her, and she felt desperate, for very pity, as she looked at the white face of the woman who had never known that glory even for a moment. To have lived for all these years and tasted so few joys; to have known nothing but care, anxiety, self-denial, cruel suffering and disappointment, and nothing but ill-treatment from the man for whom all had been endured; to lose one's life thus, and at last to die and leave no passionate regret in any heart, to be forgotten just because of the meek dutifulness which left no room for the more vivid qualities which give colour to the personality, and attract the love of others, even though they be more like faults than virtues! Would she find in heaven the love that she had missed on earth? If not, she had missed it for all eternity; she had missed everything—life itself; she was like a blind person in a world of colour, one deaf in a realm of music; and to complete the irony of this

woman's fate, the moral that her child was drawing from it now was in direct opposition to every principle for which the painful life had been given wholesale, as a willing sacrifice to God and duty. In vain, Sibella had said, was the suffering of good women.

There was a solitary oil-lamp burning in the hall when they arrived at the Manor-House. The place struck chill as one entered, and had the musty scent of old rooms seldom visited by the sunlight.

After Mrs. Sedley had been carried upstairs and laid in the great four-post bedstead, the watchers began to look anxiously for the arrival of the doctor. When he did come, hope seemed for the moment to revive. He had attended the family since Mrs. Sedley came to the Manor-House, a bride, and they all looked to him for help in time of trouble. He was a grave man, with iron-grey hair and beard, and of highly respectable appearance.

With much solemnity, he felt the patient's pulse, asked a few questions, and then sat down to write a prescription.

When he left, Viola followed him from the room.

"Tell me the truth, doctor," she said.

He looked at her doubtfully.

"I want to know if there is any hope."

"Well then, there is not," he answered quietly. "There

has been no hope for the last year and a half; the disease that your mother is suffering from has been coming on for a long time, but, with her usual stoicism, she said nothing about it till it was too late. She begged me so urgently not to reveal the truth to any of her family that I yielded, not seeing what good it would do you to know."

Viola had turned aside sick at heart. Life was one long tragedy!

"Then my mother has known for a year and a half that she was dying."

"Yes; and she suspected the truth some time before that. She has had troubles in her day, and that has hastened the mischief—in fact, I believe has induced it. But your mother has no fear of death—she is a sincere Christian, and can face it without flinching."

"And nothing can be done?" asked Viola, ignoring the consolation.

"Nothing can be done, I am sorry to say, except to relieve some of the suffering."

Viola turned hastily away. "Thank you," she said, "thank you for telling me the truth."

. . . . . .

Two anxious days passed. Lady Clevedon drove over to help in the nursing, but Mrs. Sedley would not hear of

it. A trained nurse was procured to relieve Viola, and then commenced long days of anguished watching. The suffering became more and more acute, till at last day and night there was no rest, scarcely a moment's respite from pain.

"Oh! can't you give me something to relieve it?" Viola used to ask the doctor with desperate eyes.

"I have done what I can. There is one other strong remedy I might try, but that would hasten the end. We must not do anything to anticipate by a second that appointed time. It would not be right."

The same answer was given each time that Viola renewed her appeal. She felt at last a passionate hatred of that stolid word "right."

"I detest people who think more of doing right than of being merciful!" she exclaimed in exasperation, unconscious what a mental revolution the words revealed. She had been sitting for eight hours by her mother's bedside, watching the paroxysms of anguish, helpless to relieve them.

The doctor took her outburst quite calmly, merely giving orders that Mrs. Sedley should be tended more constantly by the nurse for the future, and that Mrs. Dendraith should be with her mother only for two or three hours at a time.

"You will make yourself ill if you are not careful," he said.

"What does that matter?"

"One patient in a house is quite enough. Besides, you could not then nurse your mother at all."

Viola gave in.

Visitors now began to come from far and near to inquire for Mrs. Sedley. Adrienne, always to be found where there was trouble and her help might be needed, managed to drive over to the Manor-House to relieve Viola and to cheer her, more than once a week. Mrs. Evans lent her a pony-carriage, which sometimes Harry, sometimes Dorothy, used to drive.

On several occasions, when Adrienne had gone up to see Mrs. Sedley, Viola and Harry found themselves alone. But not a word passed between them about their last interview at Clevedon, not a word about Sibella, except on Harry's part, when he delivered a letter from her expressing regret and sympathy. Once Viola came down looking white and almost desperate.

"Your mother's suffering is worse!" Harry exclaimed, coming over to her and laying his hands on her shoulders, as if he thought that would, in some way, help her.

"Oh, it is too horrible! How can she live through it?

The power of endurance is really ghastly! Why can't people die before it comes to this? The doctor says there is a struggle between a strong constitution and a determined disease. The disease has got the upper hand, and they are fighting it out—and we can do nothing—nothing, but wait for the certain victory of the disease!"

She sank upon the nearest chair with a gesture of exhaustion, lying back for a moment with closed eyes.

Harry bent down and kissed the thin little hand as it lay passively upon her knee. It trembled, and she drew it away.

"When they know there's no hope," she said presently, "when they know that it is merely an affair of days or weeks, why don't they give the sufferer everything and anything that will put an end to the torture, though it does shorten the life by a few days? What can it matter?"

"What indeed!"

"If I knew what that medicine was I would give it myself," Viola said, rising excitedly. "Why not?—why not?" Then the impossibility of the thing overwhelmed her, and she sank down again. "If only the doctor would consent to give it, and mother to take it!" But she shook her head with a hopeless sigh. "The doctor would never consent. He is like all the rest of us, very

respectful of the last few laboured breaths when existence is only a torture, but careless how the life-stream is poisoned while there is yet the precious gift of health to save! That is just our way of doing things!"

"Viola, you are worn out—you are killing yourself!" Harry exclaimed, hastening to her side, for she looked as if she were about to faint.

"Not I," she said; "I wish to Heaven I were! That would solve the whole problem; I know no other solution."

"*I* do," said Harry in a low voice.

"Don't!" she exclaimed, turning away with an expression almost approaching to dislike. "I am inconsistent, I know, but in *this* house such words seem to burn and brand my very soul—even to see you makes one feel—oh! if you only knew how hateful it all is to me!—to think of my mother upstairs dying—trusting me absolutely—believing in me absolutely—and to meet you like this, under her roof, in this room, after—after what has passed—I must not do it—if I could tell you the anguish of self-contempt that I feel when I think of it all."

She was standing by the window with her arms raised to her head in very desperation.

"You still feel my love—our love—to be guilty, then?" he said, not daring to approach.

"Oh! yes—no—I don't know what I feel—but I can't talk of it now! Oh! why did you disturb the certainty of my beliefs? Why did you throw me into horrible conflict like this? I have nothing now to cling to! When I follow the old faith I no longer feel calmly certain that I am right. I seem to be like the doctor and the rest of them, sacrificing others to my prejudice, to the good of my foolish soul; but if for a moment I dare to adopt your ideas, then the old feeling comes rushing back-torrent like; my mother's spirit seems to stand before me, pleading, exhorting, reproaching, and then—then I fling the sweet, hideous temptation from me, as I would hurl away some venomous serpent."

It struck Harry as he watched her, and listened to her with bleeding heart, that she was a symbol of the troublous age in which she lived, a creature with weakened and uprooted faith, yet with feelings and instincts still belonging to the past, still responding to the old dead and gone dogmas.

He felt appalled at the conflict he had raised. Sibella, with her keen insight, had partly foreseen it.

Not without a severe struggle with himself, Harry promised Viola that he would not come here again, since his presence caused her so much pain, and he was rewarded by seeing a shade cross her face.

"Yes, it is better," she said, shaking her head angrily to throw off the inconsistent feeling of disappointment; "it will be much better."

"Then this is to be our last meeting for some time?" He paused irresolutely. "Come out with me into the garden. We will drop all difficult and painful topics—I will not distress you in any way, if I can help it. Whatever else we may be to one another, we are at any rate two human beings in a mysterious and disastrous world, ignorant of our fate, ignorant of pretty nearly everything except 'that grief stalks the earth, and sits down at the feet of each by turns,' as some Greek poet says. On that ground at any rate we may meet without a sense of guilt, whatever be our creeds."

He opened the low window, and together they passed from the musty smells and dimness of the damp old drawing-room into the radiance of a sweet spring morning.

The may blossom was not yet out, but every tree and bush was sprinkled with tender green; the tangled shrubberies were alive with tiny leaves. Overhead the windows of Mrs. Sedley's bedroom stood open to admit the sunshine and the balmy air.

Hearing footsteps on the gravel, Adrienne came to the window and looked out. "What a perfect morning!

Viola, you look like the genius of the spring in your white dress."

("Oh! if you only knew, what would you think?" Viola inwardly exclaimed.)

"And what do *I* look like?" inquired Harry.

"Oh! you look like a prosaic sort of Summer," said Adrienne; "one can't expect to look symbolic in a tweed suit. Harry, I wish you would go and get me some primroses, I see myriads of them in the park."

"All right; will you come too, Mrs. Dendraith?"

She assented. The primroses grew, as Adrienne had said, in myriads. Viola found herself taking more pleasure in the simple occupation of gathering them than she could have believed possible, considering the burdens that lay on her heart. How often, in the old days, had she and Geoffrey and Bill Dawkins gone wild over the flowers and the wonders of the spring! How sweet they were! How their very scent spoke of simple and innocent delight and the wonder of childhood! The throb of bewildered misery ceased under the gentle ministry of sunshine and flowers, and the unspeakable freshness of the rejoicing meadows.

When a vast bunch of primroses had been amassed, the clean, yellow trunk of a felled tree was chosen for a resting-

place, where the chequered shade of young limes tempered the sunshine. It was the site of Viola's little sylvan temple of the days of yore; here the ruthless Thomas had stood with his pruning-knife to desecrate and destroy, and now the little wood, once more in festival array, was chanting its song of spring, forgetful of the freight of the years.

Harry saw that a more peaceful look had come into Viola's face, as her eyes wandered over the flowery meadows and followed the movements of the white, hurried clouds.

She lay back resting, with a look in her eyes as if they were seeing something beyond the clouds and the blue of the heavens. The look was not one of joy, but there was neither fear nor grief in it. It was calm and penetrating. She and Fate seemed to be looking into one another's eyes steadfastly. Motionless and silent she lay thus, apparently unconscious of the flight of time.

The birds began to come close to the two still figures, and a couple of squirrels bounded after one another up the nearest tree, chattering and crying excitedly.

"When I was a little girl," Viola said at length, scarcely moving from her position, "I had a temple here; the walls were made of briony, and the pillars of eglantine. The

high altar was an ivy-bush, and for incense I had the breath of flowers. It was the Temple of Life. Roses I carried in handfuls to my shrine (that was for delight), and as the seasons went by all the sweetest flowers of the field —honeysuckle and wild-briar and violets; and then for splendour scarlet poppies, and for love and constancy forget-me-nots, and for happiness the big wide-eyed daisies of the corn-fields. I had also the enchanter's night-shade, which meant witchcraft or fascination, and then there were dead leaves in shoals for melancholy, and the harebell for grief, and for faith the passion-flower."

She paused for a moment, and then went on with a still more dreamy look in her eyes, a still more dreamy calmness in her voice:

"And I worshipped in that temple. At church, on Sundays, I prayed, but before my own little woodland altar I adored. All beautiful things were there; hope, truth, faith, happiness, and love. It is hard to explain in words what it was I worshipped. I worshipped the earth and all that is in it; I worshipped the loveliness of life.

"One day, when I came to my shrine, the beautiful temple was in the dust; I found Thomas, with his knife, cutting the briony and laying low the walls of eglantine. The high altar was flung down. After that I had to live

without a temple or an altar. Once thrown down, they can never be set up again; the deed is done for ever; the sacredness has gone, and all new temples are half-shams. And all that, item by item, happened to me afterwards in life. It was a prophecy. Now I have no temple."

A squirrel on a branch above peered curiously and timidly at the speaker, and then darted up the tree in hot haste.

"I think that I knew—child as I was—what was coming. I knew that my temple and its destruction were symbols of the future. It seems to me as if the shadow of Fate were always upon me, and that in some secret chamber of my heart is written what is to come—I see—I feel rather—shipwreck and disaster."

"That is a dangerous fancy," said Harry, gazing anxiously at the melancholy face; "it will make you yield to circumstances instead of erecting your own will into a circumstance dominating all the rest."

"There are big powers at work," she said, still in the same dreamy tone. "I can see the wave rolling in, centuries old—high, resistless, unbroken; my will and yours are mere pebbles on the shore—— Hush! do you hear that?"

She raised herself and sat listening. Harry knew what

she meant. It was the deep woeful sound in the breaking of the waves.

He tried to persuade her that such a sound was inevitable in certain states of the weather, and that he had heard it often when no disaster had followed its warning.

"Disaster will follow this," said Viola; "I feel it. I don't mean about mother. What has to come soon to her will be no disaster, but a release. There is something else coming."

Harry felt, with an inward shudder, that this was only too probable. Matters could not continue long as they were; but what turn were they to take? That was the dreadful question. With a woman of Viola's temperament there was much to be feared. She had not the habit of good fortune.

Viola presently rose abruptly.

"It is time to go."

"And must I not come again?" he asked wistfully, taking her hand and looking at her with pleading eyes.

As they stood thus they became aware of a stealthy footstep behind them. Their hands parted, and Philip Dendraith stood before them smiling.

Viola turned very white, but she did not move. Harry's attitude was quietly defiant.

"I have been to the house expecting to find you with

your mother, my dear," said Philip; "Miss Lancaster, however, has taken your place. It is very kind of Miss Lancaster."

"I was just going in," said Viola.

"Ah! I thought very likely, when I first saw you, that it would turn out that you were just going in. I have come to propose to stay for a day or two here. I thought you would miss me if we were parted too long" (this with a brilliant smile). "Shall we stroll back together?"

Philip did not allow the conversation to flag for a moment, and when Harry and Adrienne were sitting, ready to start, in the pony-carriage, he said affably, that he hoped they would soon drive over again and see them.

"You may be sure I shall come whenever I can," said Adrienne as they went off.

Philip and Viola stood watching them down the carriage-drive.

"Pious occupation, nursing one's mother," observed Philip, twirling his stick.

Viola did not answer.

"You are a deeper young person than I thought, my dear," continued Philip; "flirtation and filial piety form a remarkably judicious combination. Who could object to a

young wife's going home to nurse her mother? No one but a monster, of course; and if a young man happen to hover about the place at the same time—even though he *is* a former lover—who can object? Only the monster base enough to suspect unjustly his highly-principled spouse. Primroses—what could be more innocent? Viola," said Philip, coming closer to her, "do you really think that you can carry on a flirtation with this man under my nose without my suspecting it?"

"No, I do not think so for a moment," she replied.

"Then may I ask you why you make the attempt?"

"I did not make the attempt. I came here to nurse my mother, certainly without a thought of Mr. Lancaster's coming here."

"Injured innocence," sneered Philip.

"Not so," said Viola; "I do not call myself innocent."

"Oh, really!—a pretty confession. Then are you allowing this man to make open love to you, and have you actually the audacity to tell this to *me?*"

"I have tried hard to remain true to my old principles, but I do not feel that I have succeeded. I tell you frankly that my sense of duty and allegiance to you is no longer what it was. I have not entirely cast it off—it is too much part of my being for that—but certainly I have ceased to

feel as I used to feel about it, so I suppose there must be war between us. You need not trust me; I don't ask to be trusted, for I no longer regard it as a point of honour to follow your wishes in all things, or to make my wifehood the sole pivot of my existence. I feel that it is a false relationship, into which I ought never to have entered, and I do not now regard it as binding in the sense that I used to consider it binding—holding sway over my every deed and thought. I repeat, do not trust me now. You must watch me, frustrate me. I am no longer yours —body and soul. I belong partly to myself at last. Half of my soul, if not the whole, is liberated. Do you understand?"

"I understand that jargon? Certainly not! I only understand that if this sort of thing goes on much longer there will be nothing for it but to keep you a prisoner, with a hired attendant to watch you every hour of the day. You know that I should stick at nothing if necessity prompted. By Heaven! I would swear you were mad (I don't think I should have to perjure myself either), and have you kept under lock and key, if it came to that. You evidently don't know me yet. Meet this man again, and I promise you that will be your fate. Don't imagine I am using idle threats. That sort of thing doesn't answer with a

mule-headed woman like you. I speak without hyperbole. You shall not put my honour and my name in jeopardy though you die for it. Now go to your mother—I wish to Heaven you had never left her!"

. . . . . .

Mrs. Sedley was in great pain during all that night; Viola and the nurse took turns in watching by the bedside. The invalid had been asking anxiously for her sons, and a telegram had been despatched summoning the eldest and Geoffrey, the only ones within reach. The second was with his regiment in India.

The two arrived next morning, and it was strange to see the look on Mrs. Sedley's face when she heard their footsteps. Viola was a well-beloved child, but never had her presence evoked such a light of joy in her mother's face as shone on it now, at the sight of the young scapegrace whose extravagance had helped to bring the family to the brink of ruin, and through whom the sister had been doomed to the most terrible form of sacrifice which a woman of her type can endure.

Viola felt that after all the years of companionship between mother and daughter, this stranger son was more to her mother than she was—she who had watched by the bedside, feeling the anguish of every pang to her heart's

core, knew that the last look of love would be turned not on her but on him.

And so it proved.

The exaltation of feeling caused by her sons' return caused a rally in the invalid, but before evening the watchers saw that she was weaker, and that the alarming symptoms were increasing.

The doctor was summoned, for the second time that day, and every one waited in suspense for his coming. There was a hush all through the house which seemed the deeper from the heavy mist that hung about the park, the white, familiar mist so characteristic of the shut-in, gloomy unhealthy old house, over which the hand of death was resting. What could be more appropriate than death in that atmosphere of fog and stagnation? Not the faintest stir was in the air; the movement and tumult of life had no place here. It was a spot where the most vigorous, if forbidden to return speedily to the outer world of hope and effort, might feel ready to lie down and die.

The sound of the doctor's phaeton broke through the stillness.

His verdict was decisive; the patient had not many hours to live. Seeing what she suffered, her family were to be congratulated.

A terrible five hours passed before the end came—hours which seemed to Viola like so many years of cruel experience. Mr. Sedley, when he was at last made to understand what must happen, became almost distraught. He knelt at the bedside sobbing like a child, entreating his wife to stay with him, declaring that he should be lost without her, that he had always adored her, even at his worst, and imploring her to forgive him for his past ill-conduct.

"My husband, if I have anything to forgive, I forgive it freely; I would have borne from you whatever you might choose to inflict. Was I not your wife?"

"I have been a brute," he groaned.

She laid her thin long hand on his head and said a few words in his ear.

"I will try," he said, sobbing; "I will try."

Her voice was growing very weak; the last moments were evidently drawing near.

"Ah! you have ever been a good and dutiful child," she said, as Viola, with quivering lips, bent down and kissed her. "God has been very good to me. You will be faithful to your life's end."

At the last a great peace seemed to fall upon the dying woman; she murmured texts from the Bible, interspersed

with words of exhortation to follow Christ, to walk with Him to the end, to seek Him, and lose all for His sake.

"He has given me rest and peace; He has saved my soul with His precious blood."

A woman of one mood, of one motive, one thought, she died as she had lived, with her eyes fixed on the same image; the aspect and perspective of all things still unchanged. She spoke in gasps: "Viola, you will be faithful to the end—my husband, God will forgive—we shall meet again—God be with you, dear ones! To Him I commend you, till our blessed reunion in Christ—Christ my God, save and forgive!"

A last long kiss, whose memory remained vividly to Viola's dying day, the final pitiful farewells in the fading light of that dreary fate-laden afternoon, and then all was over.

Viola felt herself being drawn away by a firm kindly hand as the dying agony drew to its crisis.

"Do not grieve—I am thankful—so thankful."

The last look was for the son, the last prayer for his salvation.

The long martyrdom was over. As far as earthly prescience could decide, the tired woman was at rest.

The agonising wheel of life had ceased to whirl, and where there had been pain and striving there was a black unconsciousness. Oh! to pierce for one moment that veil of mystery! to follow the soul through these gates of darkness!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DUST TO DUST.

THOSE were ghastly days at the Manor-House which succeeded Mrs. Sedley's death.

The dull fog still clung about the park and shrouded the avenue, and on the second day a sullen rain began to fall, making everything sodden and unspeakably dreary. Mr. Sedley appeared to be perfectly stunned by his loss. He had never believed in illness, unless it were a case of scarlet or typhoid fever. That any woman could go about with a mortal disease gnawing at her life, performing her ordinary duties, was an idea quite out of his range and it seemed almost impossible for him to realise that the old order of things which his wife had for so long maintained at the Manor-House was over and done with for ever. Mr. Sedley very soon set up a fiction that he had been a devoted husband, and that his loss had utterly broken him. His bewilderment, discomfort, and the profound disturbance of long-established habits were all placed to the

account of grief for the loss of his wife. The workings of remorse which had assailed him on her deathbed were not yet stilled, so that altogether the man's state of mind was truly pitiable.

Viola never knew how those dreadful days before the funeral were lived through. There was no sympathy between her and her father; she felt resentment against him for his conduct towards her mother, and could scarcely listen in patience to his eulogies and lamentations, now that she was dead and his tardy appreciation could avail her nothing.

With her second brother, who had been abroad during the greater part of his career, Viola felt almost like a stranger, but she and Geoffrey drew nearer together during that funereal experience. He was strongly affected by his mother's loss, not so much because he deeply felt it, as because he found himself for the first time in the presence of death. He began to confide some of his difficulties to Viola, when they sat alone by the fire in the evenings, perhaps after passing together the door of that closed room where the dead woman lay, cold and peaceful.

"Viola, they say that in another fifty years nobody will believe in the immortality of the soul."

They were sitting in the drawing-room towards evening,

the curtains not yet drawn. Outside was the same greyness and mist that had hung about the place since Mrs. Sedley's death.

"I haven't thought much about these things, to tell you the truth; I imagined that I believed in immortality and God and religion, but now"—he paused with a look of awe on his face;—"what do you think, Viola? I suppose you think as we were all brought up to think in our childhood."

"O Geoffrey, I don't know!" Viola exclaimed, thrusting her hand through her hair and crouching lower over the fire. "I have been so much shaken lately. I begin to feel that our old beliefs will have to be learnt and believed all over again, if they are to be of any use to us. They don't answer to one's call when one is in dire extremity. They leave you—O Geoffrey! I believe they leave you more lonely and hopeless than professed unbelievers are left in the presence of their dead! I can't tell you what a sense of despair comes to me when I look at our mother's face—peaceful as it is. I can't help thinking of her life, and the utter ruin of it, and the mistake of it—and nobody understands! I feel, when people *will* console one and talk about heaven and all that, as if I would rather they told me brutally that there is no hope: that it is all a

silly delusion; that there is no ground for our faiths, no pity for our love, no answer to our yearnings—anything would be better than this cant consolation which you know only springs from custom and not from conviction."

Geoffrey looked amazed.

"I had no idea"——

"No, of course you hadn't," she interposed hastily. "I am frightened of it myself; and yet I feel as if there were some faith more real than the faith of our childhood;—only I can't find it."

The conversation was an epoch in Geoffrey's life, and the strengthening of a new impetus in Viola's. It was also the beginning of a friendship on fresh foundations between brother and sister, which entirely altered the direction of development of Geoffrey's character.

The day of the funeral was cold and damp. It seemed a singularly appropriate day for the burial of one whose whole life had been pitched in that low tone of colour. Side by side Geoffrey and Viola watched the gloomy procession draw up to the door, the silent decorous bustle of black-coated mutes, and then the lifting of the coffin into the hearse.

Some feeling which Viola could not have explained induced her to witness every cruel detail. Among the

rows of ghostly trees the black procession moved solemnly to the park-gates. Alighting from the coach at the churchyard steps, Viola was carried back in memory to her wedding-day, when she had passed between rows of villagers and over garlands of fresh flowers to the clanging of the noisy bells.

In another few minutes they were all in their places, Mr. Sedley and his two sons, Philip and Viola, side by side in the chancel.

Every family in the neighbourhood and all the Upton people were represented, and among the congregation were the Manor-House coachman, Thomas the gardener, and "old Willum," a little more bent, but otherwise just the same as of yore. At the sight of him, for the first time Viola had to force back threatening tears.

But the trial was yet to come.

The first part of the ceremony over, the procession moved out to the grey churchyard and wended its way through the tombstones to the open grave. Viola's heart gave a sick throb.

Cold, gloomy, gruesome! There was not a gleam of hope, not a ray of sunshine or of triumph in the whole depressing scene! It seemed as if, in life and in death, Mrs. Sedley were alike incapable of evoking such a pas-

sionate note. Her Christian's faith and her Christian's trust were equally destitute of inspiring force. "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust." Never in her life had Viola doubted so profoundly, never had she plunged into such an abyss of far-reaching despair, of religion, of God, as when she stood by her mother's grave and watched the coffin with its white wreaths being lowered into the earth. How greedy it seemed, yearning to close up over its prey! She turned aside with a sick heart.

The bystanders were flinging flowers on to the coffin; primroses and violets and the first-fruits of the garden. As through the mists of a dream Viola saw familiar faces round the grave. Mr. Evans was there, and Dick, and Sir Philip and Lady Dendraith, and Thomas, and "old Willum," and Mr. Pellett (how kind of him to come!); and there was Caleb, looking solemn and argumentative, in the background.

At first sight of his face Viola was seized with a mad impulse to laugh. A disposition to philosophic utterance seemed to be contending in him with a sense of propriety, but a single glance was enough to convey to his familiar friends that he regarded death as no evil, and that, consciousness being involved in the ideas of pain and pleasure, Death might, in fact, be looked upon as the great Emanci-

pator! As Viola's eyes turned away from the countenance of the philosopher they lighted unexpectedly upon another and even more familiar face!

She had been told by Mrs. Evans that Harry Lancaster was not to be at the funeral, but Mrs. Evans must have been misinformed, for there he stood, half-hidden by Sir Philip's stalwart form, and partially eclipsed at intervals by Mrs. Pellett's new funereal bonnet. Viola gave a visible start, and at the same instant, as if in grim comment on the nature of all human affection, the first clod of earth fell with a dull thud upon the coffin. The sweet flowers lay crushed and stained beneath it.

"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust"—(Viola's eyes contracted with a look of terror)—"in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life." She looked up piteously, as if she were asking whether that hope were real and trustworthy, or utterly empty, as it seemed to her to-day in this grey churchyard amidst the black-gloved respectability that hung its head decorously round the grave.

"In sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life."

"Eternal Life!" Harry was not more hope-inspired than Viola at that moment. His thoughts followed a

melancholy impulse: for that dim defrauded unresponsive spirit what would life eternal have to offer? Growth, discovery, creation? a tapestried experience making richer the possibilities of all human existence? Not this, but only a stagnant gazing at the same monotonous group of images, a repetition *ad infinitum* of the same dull idea! That surely was not *life*. With all her sanctity, with all her religious enthusiasm, the dead woman had no breadth of spiritual outlook; it was to little local things that her mind held relation; to changing temporal institutions that she clung, flinging over them the mantle of religion.

An existence entirely composed of spiritual experience, an eternal life, in which no small observances or earthly things had part, was utterly impossible for such a nature.

Less reasoned, but none the less profound, was Viola's doubt of the promises of the burial-service. Oh! for a moment of blind unquestioning belief—anything to still the horrible fear that possessed her, as she peered down into the black abyss of Death, and felt the spirit departing from her for ever!

Harry divined that she was passing through a great mental crisis. What might the new wave of emotion sweep away in its course? These thoughts of death had touched her closely indeed.

What if some day she had to stand beside *another* grave and hear that dull thud upon the coffin-lid as the greedy earth closed round it? What would she feel then, if she had allowed the beloved and loving soul to go from her, perhaps for ever, into the great darkness, still thinking that his love was but half-returned, still grieving and sore at heart because of her? Would any one of the motives for which she had done this thing seem worth a thought at such a moment? Ah! no; desperate and heart-stricken, she would feel only that she had been false to the one good in life, and that now the bitterness, sorrow, and hopeless remorse had come too late!

In the presence of Death she was conscious of the unutterable pathos of all affection, the tragedy that comes sooner or later in the train of every intense human emotion.

Harry, watching her intently as she stood with her eyes fixed upon the grave, felt a growing conviction that the battle with Fate which he and Sibella were waging for the possession of this woman's soul, had entered upon a new phase. She looked up, and their eyes met.

He drew a long breath. Viola was awake at last; loving to her utmost, hating to her utmost; reckless and well-nigh desperate. She was ready now for anything. They were on their way to the crucial moment. Had she suffi-

cient force to hold on to the end? Once resolved, would she fling behind her all weak remorse, free herself from the clinging remnants of abandoned motives? Would she eschew fatal hesitations, and prove herself to be made of the stuff which produces great deeds of heroism or of crime? Would she act boldly and consistently, as she had resolved, or would she show herself the child of her circumstances, stumbling fatally under the burden of her sad woman's heritage of indecision, fear, vain remorse, untimely scruples? No marvel if she did so, but woe to her and to all concerned, if she failed in courage at the critical moment!

A short time now would decide everything!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN GRIM EARNEST.

Yes, she was ready for anything! She moved as one in a dream; the people around her seemed like shadows. She played her part among them, but even as she spoke that grey churchyard, with its open grave, was before her mind's eye; she heard the thud of earth upon the coffin-lid, while the clammy mist seemed to be clinging round her, and the words went out mournfully over the tombs, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Sad, hopeless, terrible, seemed the game of life; the thought of it created a recklessness that Viola had never known before.

Scruples, hesitations, seemed ridiculous in the gaunt presence of Death, who mocks at human effort and cuts short the base and the noble at their work with grim impartiality. Yet as soon as she left the Manor-House to return to her cliffside home, the daring spirit suddenly departed from her, as if by magic. On the instant that

she crossed the threshold, she felt the strange gloomy will-destroying influence of the place descend upon her pall-like. Philip's dominant spirit seemed to pervade the whole house, even in his absence.

Though he was often away from home, he used to appear at uncertain hours during the day, and Viola never knew when she was likely to be alone. He seemed to take a delight in haunting her, and in turning up when and where she least expected him. He used to come in stealthily and appear at her elbow before she knew of his approach. This custom had the effect of making her intensely and miserably nervous. After that experience in the west wing she had been very easily startled, and now she lived in a perpetual state of strain and dread, and had contracted a habit of perpetually looking up in expectation of her husband's panther-like approach. Her power of resistance and initiative seemed to be charmed out of her by the mere atmosphere of the place; it was almost as if Philip possessed some mysterious magnetic force, so overwhelming was the influence which he exerted over all within his reach, especially over those of nervous temperament.

In spite of the associations of the room in the west wing, Viola was still attracted to it, and she felt, moreover, that

she could never rest until she had found, and put back in its place, the precious knife which she had let fall in her terror. But she dreaded that Philip should find her there again, and for that reason put off, day by day, her intended visit to that haunt of shadows.

Once Philip announced that he was going out for the whole afternoon, and Viola resolved to choose that day for her quest. It would not take more than a few minutes to replace the knife in the oak cabinet; if she went immediately after her husband left the house, surely even *he* could not discover her.

She watched him out of sight, and then looking nervously round, she crossed the dark hall, avoiding the smiling eyes of the portraits, and passed through the door leading to the west wing. The stillness of so many empty rooms was oppressive. Stepping as quietly as she could, Viola passed the closed doors until she came to the death-chamber, whose lock she turned with beating heart. After a moment's pause she entered.

There was the great black bedstead, sombre and solemn; there stood the oak cabinet, with its carved door half-open, just as it had been left on that dreadful afternoon. Viola sickened with reasonless terror. She felt as if she must turn and leave her errand unaccomplished. But she

resisted the impulse, and went forward with her eyes fixed on the floor seeking the fallen knife.

Is there, after all, some Fate that guides the footsteps of men and maps out their path for them from birth to death? Viola had always been convinced that she was thus guided; she had given up all expectation of rescue, and looked into the eyes of Destiny mournfully and hopelessly. Every movement, every act, every thought, was preordained to lead up to misfortune.

She stooped suddenly and picked up the knife from the floor, where it lay just as she had dropped it. She was thankful to hold it again in her hands, to know that it was safe. When last she held it thus she was battling fiercely against herself, against the supreme passion of her life; and now——! now the battle had been lost—conscience was defeated, faith and hope abandoned. She laid the little dagger passionately to her lips, looking round, with her quick nervous glance, as if dreading every moment to see the form of her husband looming through the dusk. Then she laid the knife carefully in its hiding-place, beside the other treasures, locked the cabinet, and with a sigh of relief turned away.

A qualm of fear passed through her as she approached the bed, but this time no figure emerged from its shadows.

She reached the door safely, went out, and turned the key.

Thank Heaven the ordeal was over! On turning her heart gave a great bound, for she found herself standing face to face with—Mrs. Barber. She uttered a little cry of dismay, and put out her hand to steady herself against the lintel of the door.

"Mrs. Barber," she said at last, "what are you doing up here?"

Mrs. Barber set her lips.

"I am here, ma'am," she replied with dignity, "in the performance of my duty. I come to see that the rooms are kept in order."

"Oh!" said Viola.

"Your tea is waiting for you," added Mrs. Barber, who felt that she had the best of the situation; "it has been in the morning-room for half-an-hour."

"I will go and take it," said Viola hurriedly.

She hastened down the echoing corridor, crossed the hall, and shut herself into the little ante-room where, as Mrs. Barber had reproachfully announced, the tea was standing untouched. But the tea had yet longer to wait.

Viola went down on her knees on the hearthrug, absently taking the poker and goading the already willing little fire

into a brighter blaze. Maria, who was basking in the warmth, set up a loud purring and rubbed herself against the arm of her mistress.

Viola knew now for certain what she had often before vaguely suspected: that in Philip's absence she was watched by the housekeeper! Again and again she had found reason to fear it, and to-day's instance confirmed the suspicion. There remained not the shadow of doubt in her mind that Mrs. Barber had followed her this afternoon to the west wing; in fact, Mrs. Barber was her jailer. Who would Philip employ next? Possibly the kitchen-maid! The walls of her prison seemed to be coming nearer and nearer. Viola was reminded of the gruesome old story of the prisoner shut up in a tower, whose walls encroached a foot each day, till at last they closed in and crushed him to death. When would the catastrophe arrive? She would rather it came at once, than hang back and keep her perpetually on the rack of expectation and dread. She gave a nervous shudder and looked round the room suspiciously, as if fearing that she was even now not alone. The whole household might be spies, for aught that she knew! There was no evading Philip's vigilance. It seemed as if her most secret thoughts were at his mercy.

Feeling nervous and overwrought, Viola was just moving

into a low chair before the fire, when a faint sound caught her ear. She started and looked round, expecting to see her husband. But there was no one in the room. The sound came again: a faint tapping on the window-pane.

Viola's heart began to beat. She listened anxiously. In another second, again came the stealthy tap upon the glass.

It was raining, and there was a slight beating of rain-drops on the panes, which Viola tried to think she might have mistaken for the other sound; but when this was repeated a third time she rose, summoning all her courage, and went towards the window. Then out in the dusk she saw a man's figure, and a man's face looking in. She clutched the nearest chair, turning very white. The man signed to her to open the window. She hesitated for a moment, and then, with a sort of blind courage, she went close to it and peered out.

"Who is it?"

"Don't be afraid; it is Caleb Foster," a voice replied. "Open the window."

In an instant the roar of the sea smote loudly on the ear, and the soft west wind and rain were blowing into the fire-lit room.

"What is it? Will you come in? or"—— she hesitated, looking back nervously over her shoulder.

"Come out to me," said Caleb. "I won't detain you a moment. Oh, it is raining; you will get wet."

"No matter—no matter." She snatched up a rug from the sofa and stepped out on to the gusty terrace. The waves were dragging the stones savagely back and forward just below, the terrace almost overhanging the sea at high tide.

"I was directed to give you this," said Caleb calmly, bringing a letter from his pocket, where it had evidently not gained in cleanliness or smoothness, "and I was told to bid you be of good cheer, and brave and determined, for you have faithful friends."

"Are you in their confidence?" asked Viola, flushing.

"I know nothing," said Caleb; "private affairs are not my business. I am called to deliver a note and a ridiculous message, and I deliver them. If other people take pleasure in emotional excesses, I regret it; but, on the principle that the individual is at liberty to do what he pleases, on condition that he does not encroach upon the liberty of others, I offer no obstruction to the errors of our friends. They employ me as a messenger—I am willing to oblige; I ask no questions. Should you consult me I might be ready to give my opinion; otherwise I abstain from interference. Good-evening. The sooner I am off the better. One

word of unasked advice, however—don't act on impulse; think everything out calmly from all sides; count the cost before you take any decided step, and don't fly in the face of the world if you can avoid it. Socrates"—— but Caleb thought better of it, and retired without mentioning what Socrates had to say on this point.

Viola hastened into the house to read her letter. It was from Harry, asking her to meet him at a spot on the downs, about a quarter of a mile from the coastguard station, on the following afternoon at four o'clock. Sibella was expecting a visit from Philip at that time, so there would be no difficulty. Harry would be at the appointed spot in any case; if Viola did not come, he would know that something had happened to prevent her.

Viola pressed her hands to her brow distractedly. The time for decision had indeed come! Every fear, prejudice, faith, principle, superstition which she had ever known, rushed back upon her in a mighty flood, forbidding a response to the appeal of this letter. The secrecy was revolting to her instincts, the deceit and plotting intolerable. She realised, nevertheless, that she had to choose between that and life-long endurance of her present fate. These left her no alternative. But there was no time now to think it out, for she heard a soft footstep in the corridor.

Flinging the letter into the fire, she stood awaiting her husband's approach. He had returned very soon. Maria got up and slunk away.

"Well, my dear," he said, with his wonted smile, "what have you been doing this afternoon? You are flushed." —(She put her hands to her cheeks.)—"I see too that you have not taken your tea." He looked at her keenly.

She felt that he would read every secret in her eyes.

"I am not a great tea-drinker," she said.

"Still you do generally take it. Have you had visitors?"

"No one has been in the house."

"Oh! have you met some one *out* of the house?"

"I saw Caleb," she answered, struggling against the benumbing sensation of powerlessness which Philip's presence always created in her.

"You and Caleb seem to have a great deal in common," he remarked. "Were you out, then, in all this rain?"

"Yes, for a short time."

"Talking to Caleb?"

"Yes."

"Would it seem impertinent if I were to inquire the subject of your colloquy?"

She hesitated.

"I think you may just as well tell me," said Philip; "I shall find out if I wish to know."

"Are you going to cross-question Caleb?"

"That is a matter of detail," said Philip. "I only remark that if I wish to know I *shall* know. How have you been spending the rest of the afternoon?"

"I am tired of answering questions," she said, with a sudden flash of rebellion.

"Oh! something up evidently this afternoon. That too I shall find out. Your affairs seem to be getting into a very complicated condition, my dear; I can't say that I think you have the head to carry through an elaborate system of plots and deception. It seems also a little inconsistent with your upbringing and your 'principles.' I suppose, however, it is the natural weapon of the weaker vessel. Women take to it by instinct."

"By necessity, you might say."

"From preference, my dear. I know your adorable sex."

Philip established himself in the easy-chair and stretched himself leisurely.

"An unusually good fire," he said, leaning back and crossing his legs. "You have been burning something, I see."

Viola looked round with a start, and Philip smiled.

"There is a little bit of charred paper sticking to the side of the grate."

He took the poker and turned it down, and as the heat caught it the lines of handwriting were visible in little glowing spots across the notepaper. "Put two and two together. H'm. Did Caleb bring a note?"

"I have already explained that I would rather not answer any more questions," said Viola. "If you are so certain of finding out all that you wish to know, why catechise me? Find out what you please; I don't think I should care very much what you found out!"

She was thinking of a grey churchyard and an open grave, and the thought of it brought a delicious sense of rest. If the worst came to the worst——

"My dear," said Philip, "excuse my saying so, but you are losing your looks."

She raised her eyebrows slightly, but did not answer.

"All this plotting keeps you anxious—it is not becoming."

She smiled.

"You do not seem to take much interest in your dress, either," he went on. "Now there is no greater folly a wife can be guilty of than to neglect her appearance. Her husband is apt to follow after strange gods"——

"The stranger the better," Viola muttered between her teeth.

"You may treat all these matters with disdain, my dear, but I can assure you your conduct is most foolish. A man expects his wife to make some effort to attract him."

Viola was silent.

"To be frank, my dear, you have in every way turned out unsatisfactory: as an investment (so to put it) I may say that you are, in point of fact, more or less of a fraud; pardon my crudeness. I bargained for a wife who would behave as other wives behave, and also I naturally expected that she would do what you have hitherto failed to do, provide the family with an heir."

"A duty and a privilege indeed!" Viola observed.

"Why you sneer I know not," said Philip. "I could have had women by the dozen who would have been only too delighted to fill your position at any price. Perhaps you will understand that I feel a little 'sold' under the circumstances."

"I understand only too well everything that has to do with our fatal marriage. Why won't you let me go?"

"And have a scandal attached to my name! No, thank you, that won't suit me at all. It will suit me better to bring you to reason. I have tried fair means, and they

have failed; now I shall try foul. I am tired of all these childish conspiracies with your former lover and his *chère amie*, who, you may not be aware, is carrying on a flirtation with that gay Lothario at the same time that she makes love to *me*."

"To you!"

"Yes, my innocent one, to *me*."

Viola looked at him coldly. "You are very clever," she said; "but there are some women whom you could not understand if you studied them for a thousand years! Mrs. Lincoln is one of them."

"Then *you* understand this Sybilline creature!"

"No; but I am not so hopelessly at fault as you are, for at least I am *aware* that I do not understand her."

"Well, if a man of the world doesn't know when a woman wants to flirt with him, he ought to be ashamed of himself."

Viola could only look at her husband in bewilderment. Why was he telling her this? Did he really believe what he said, or was it to arouse in her mind distrust of Sibella? Surely Philip could not be attempting to excite her jealousy! He was too clever for that; yet what could be his motive for such assertions? If Sibella had given any reason for them, it was certainly for some object connected with

Viola's own fate. Harry's letter said that Philip was expected to call at Fir Dell to-morrow afternoon. What did this mean? Viola was puzzling over these things when Philip broke the silence once more.

"Now, my dear, I should like you to try to understand what I say. I have stood a great deal of nonsense from you, knowing how absurdly you were brought up, and how ignorant you were of the ways of the world. But it is really time that you knew a little more. Perhaps you are not aware that before our marriage my father advanced a large sum of money to your father, to enable him to pay his debts and to stay on at the Manor-House, which otherwise he would have had to leave. Liberal settlements were made on you, and in fact, your father, knowing my infatuation, availed himself of the opportunity to make a good haul. I, of course, thought so charming a bride ample indemnification. I believe that your father did pay some of his debts and he continued to live at the Manor-House, but he also began to contract fresh debts, on the strength of his alliance with our family, and it is morally certain that we shall never see a penny of that money again. You will pardon my remarking that, all things considered, your father got decidedly the better of us."

"It would be more reasonable to complain of these

matters to him, then," said Viola. "I, being not the seller but the thing sold, can scarcely be held responsible. The object of merchandise called to account for its owner's delinquencies?—surely that is very unbusiness-like! If you allowed yourself to be imposed upon you have no one but yourself to blame. Such accidents will happen even to the cleverest of purchasers."

"Still, I think that the matter concerns you more closely than you are disposed to allow," said Philip. "If a man buys a pointer who will not point, he has either to send him back to where he came from, or to train him into better ways—with the help of the whip, if necessary."

Viola's eyes flashed.

"You can go too far with me," she said.

"Possibly; but up to now it seems I have not gone far enough."

"I don't see what remains for you to do as regards insult and insolence."

"Oh! I assure you we are only beginning. I have been playing hitherto, and playing very badly. In future it shall be in grim earnest. I shall exact what is due to the uttermost farthing."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A PERILOUS PROJECT.

ADRIENNE LANCASTER disturbed husband and wife at their *tête-à-tête*. She was in a state of great anxiety, for she had just learnt that her mother stood in imminent danger of losing the little pittance on which they had hitherto been struggling to live and to keep up appearances. What was to become of them if the blow did fall Adrienne dared scarcely conjecture. She was in the utmost distress, for her mother had been urging her to accept Bob Hunter's proposal, resorting to tears, commands, reproaches, and finally to "wrestlings in prayer" in her daughter's presence.

Adrienne was looking ill and worried.

"Everything seems to come at once," she said; "Harry also is a great anxiety to me."

She said that her brother went perpetually to Mrs. Lincoln's, who was doing him incalculable harm; he seemed perfectly infatuated, and would hear no word against her.

"At this very moment," said Adrienne despairingly, "he

is sitting in her library at Fir Dell, listening to one knows not what wickedness and folly."

Had Adrienne been present at Fir Dell she would have been astonished indeed! It was worse even than she thought.

"I wish to Heaven we could do this without so much plotting and concealment," Harry was saying. "Viola hates it, and I fear at any moment, she may do something desperate which will upset all our plans."

"The sooner we make our attempt the better," said Sibella; "but, for my part, I have no scruple about using the only weapons left us by the enemy. A prisoner has to use such means as he can find. If he takes his jailer honestly into his confidence, his chances of regaining his freedom are, to say the least of it, inconsiderable. Picture to yourself a man bound hand and foot, and at the same time cunningly persuaded by those who have bound him that he must make no deceitful and underhand attempt to liberate himself. That man is evidently an idiot if he does not laugh at such teaching, and employ any method that offers itself—subterfuge, stratagem, what you will, in order to oppose the brute force which has been used against him."

"I wish you could persuade Viola of this."

"I can never persuade her," Sibella answered. "The grim necessities of her position may force her to use distasteful tools, but she will never lose her scruples. She will never see that these hesitations, this half-heartedness in the struggle for freedom, tend as much as the direct force of the enemy to make it unattainable. But this is the work of centuries; it is in the blood; arguments are unavailing. We must trust to the force of the *personal* impetus in Viola's case. She will never change her feeling rapidly enough through the suasion of ideas. What are ideas in the face of prejudices? Stars at midday."

"Do you think she will keep the appointment to-morrow afternoon?" asked Harry.

"I would not count too surely upon it. Her feelings are at present chaotic. She may at any moment have a relapse and determine to 'do her duty,' as she calls it, to the end. If you have any news to tell me, come to the beach below my house to-morrow morning. Come in any case, as I may have something to say to you. Try and keep your sister away from Viola, if you can. She is a dangerous foe to us. We could scarcely have one more formidable."

Harry shook his head gloomily.

Everything seemed to be going wrong. The pending family calamity was not only most unfortunate in itself,

but it happened at a most unfortunate time. His mother was incessantly urging Adrienne to accept Bob Hunter's proposal, and Adrienne seemed at her wits' end to know what to do. She said she would try to find employment in teaching if the worst came to the worst. If it did come to the worst, Harry felt that he could not desert them, and then what was to become of Viola? It was, however, decided that plans for the flight should be made with her on the following afternoon, as if nothing had occurred. If she agreed, Sibella was to be informed at once. Viola and Harry were to leave the country as quickly as possible, beginning life over again, and making up their minds to face all possibilities.

"Don't forget at any time that you *did* decide to take the risk," said Sibella. "Viola risks more than you do, and whatever troubles you may have to bear, they must inevitably fall harder upon her. She gives up everything for your sake—always remember that when the time for feeling what *you* have sacrificed begins. I need scarcely tell you this, but even the best of men are sometimes forgetful."

"I hope I shall not be forgetful in this matter," said Harry gravely, "though I am not among the best of men."

Sibella undertook to do all she could to detain Philip

next day as long as she could, though she felt it impossible to answer for him. She harboured a suspicion that he had guessed their whole plan, and was quietly watching them, ready at the right moment to frustrate it. There was something about his expression and manner that was not reassuring. He never breathed a word hinting at suspicion, but Sibella feared that he did suspect. On that day when they had met on the beach, a challenge was tacitly given and accepted between them. Philip Dendraith was not the man to forget that challenge, and he knew that Sibella's memory was at least as long as his. They were thus in a state of secret war, though they always met with compliments and smiles, and fenced with one another with never-flagging energy and skill.

"We never tire," said Sibella. "He is resolved, and I am resolved. I am not like Viola. I fight such an adversary with the first best weapon. I will oppose force with fraud till justice has delivered us. What do I care? Injury and insult to a suffering sister shall not be allowed to succeed for want of a little frank transgression. I will fool him to the top of his bent if I can, as he would fool me. What man can stand flattery? I flatter him. Sometimes I think I have made way, but possibly his submission is only a ruse to deceive me—one can never

tell. Still the man is vain; the heel of Achilles!—he is used to the homage of women! That gives me a handle. If he thought I was falling a victim to his fascinations, I believe even *his* astuteness would fail him! Well, we shall see! Everything hangs on the next few days. Much depends on to-morrow's interview being safely achieved and the arrangements carefully made. Give Viola written directions in case of mistakes, and make sure she understands them thoroughly. And don't be so excited at seeing her again that you forget to be cautious. Philip may have discovered Caleb's visit, for aught we know. You can't be too careful. Play your part bravely and cautiously. Everything depends on trifles. Meanwhile I shall be anxiously thinking of you, while I and my visitor will entertain one another with our usual flow of badinage and compliment. There are few things I would not do in order to defeat this man." Sibella's lips set themselves firmly. "A fierce struggle lies before us now. See if (as Pope says) 'you don't find me equivocating pretty genteelly!'"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE WHIRLPOOL OF FATE.

The force of circumstances prevailed. Mrs. Dixie, overpowered by anxiety and vexation, became sufficiently ill to work upon her daughter's fears, and when next morning the dreaded blow fell, Adrienne became thoroughly alarmed at her mother's condition.

The old lady was now perpetually alluding to the Workhouse as the final destination of the Lancaster family, and Adrienne was given to understand that this declension of their fortunes was entirely her doing. Mrs. Dixie even descended to particulars regarding their future existence at the expense of their country. Adrienne, knowing that they were in truth quite penniless, and that her mother's life depended upon careful nursing, was in secret despair. At this crisis Fate decreed that Bob Hunter should appear again at the Cottage to repeat his periodic proposal. Adrienne, tired out with trouble and perplexity, ended by accepting it.

From that moment Mrs. Dixie began to recover, and

Bob Hunter pirouetted in triumph. This was far from being the happiest time of Adrienne's life! She thought of Sibella and wondered what she would say when she heard of the engagement.

"But what is that woman to me?" she angrily asked herself.

On that same eventful morning Adrienne went over to Upton Castle to announce the news. She was anxious not to allow it to reach her friend through side-channels of gossip.

Viola's congratulations were not effusive. "*Adrienne!* how could you be so mad?"

Adrienne had not mentioned the loss of their income.

She coloured a little.

"Bob is a good fellow at heart, you know—and I do think it is all for the best—and I mean to do my utmost to make him happy; and then—well, you know there is my mother ill, and wanting all sorts of things we can't get her, and she feels so terribly our position. You know it is as we feared. She got a letter this morning. Things could not be worse."

"O Adrienne, I am grieved! What a curse the want of money seems to be! And you have to—to sacrifice yourself because of this."

"Am I to watch my mother dying and know that there

is nothing before us in the future but genteel starvation? Indeed I don't see how it can be even genteel."

"I think," said Viola, growing very white, "that it is better to be in your grave, than alive and—a woman."

Adrienne was shocked.

"Oh no, dear Viola. A woman always has a noble and a happy sphere in her home, wherever it may be: we must not take despairing views of life."

"This ought not to be," cried Viola, clutching her hand. "Can't your brother help you? Can't you work? Can't you"——

"And my mother ill, our home broken up, and not a penny to call our own? After all, I am going to do my duty to Bob, and I always think it is a woman's fault if her home isn't happy."

Adrienne did not meet with much more encouragement when she told her brother of her engagement.

"I believe it to be my duty," she said.

"Oh! in that case——! I have sometimes wondered how these things come about; the process seems very simple." Presently he laid his hand on her shoulder, softening. "So the burden is laid upon you," he said, with a sigh; "why can't I bear it instead?"

She shook her head. "That is impossible, as you know.

Don't grieve, dear Harry; I am not unhappy. I feel that I am doing right, and that I shall have strength to perform my task."

Harry thought that his sister had had enough tasks to perform already. What she needed was the radiance of a great joy to warm and expand her whole being. Always in the shade, she was becoming pale and poor, like a flower grown in a cellar. In course of time she would perhaps become a second Mrs. Evans, busily adding to the depression of an already low-spirited world.

"I am satisfied that it is my duty," said Adrienne.

"Oh! confound this everlasting duty!" Harry exclaimed.

Adrienne did not at once reply. She had noticed that her brother had become quick-tempered, not to say morose, of late, and she wondered if Mrs. Lincoln had anything to do with this change for the worse.

"You may say, 'Confound duty,' dear Harry," said Adrienne, "but you know that you feel its sacred call in your heart, and dare not disobey it any more than I dare to do so."

"I assure you, you are mistaken," said Harry, who in his present mood regarded "duty" with much acrimony and ill-will. "I would dare to do anything. No good comes of prudence, or duty either, that I can see."

Adrienne was much concerned at her brother's frame of mind, and again put it down to the evil influence of Mrs. Lincoln.

"I wish I could get you to look upon my engagement in a different light, dear Harry," she pleaded.

"Pray mention the light," said Harry affably, "and I shall be charmed to oblige you."

She shook her head.

"Don't you recognise that duty"——

"Look here, if you mention that word again," said Harry, "I shall emigrate."

"No, no," interposed Adrienne hastily. "You *must* see that for a woman"——

"Timbuctoo or the Wild West," he murmured threateningly.

"A woman's lot in life is different from a man's," Adrienne persisted.

"Very," said Harry. "She can't go off at a moment's notice to Timbuctoo."

"Upon her shoulders is laid the beautiful and sacred cares and responsibilities of married life, and I believe that upon these rest the very foundations of society."

"Once upon a time," said Harry grimly, "it was the custom to build a living creature into the foundations of

every city and every city-wall, for without that little formality—as our thoughtful ancestors supposed—the city could not stand. This premature interment, with such unpleasantness as might ensue to the chosen instruments, was intended to make firm and solid the foundations of society. Perhaps it did. The foundations at any rate seem to be exceedingly solid and firm! When is the marriage to be?"

"As soon as possible. Bob wants it at once, and mother too. We should not go away for more than a week, or perhaps less, so that mother could come to us almost immediately. We thought the wedding might be in ten days. Of course you will give me away."

"If you wish it—— In ten days," he repeated thoughtfully to himself. After that he fell into a reverie from which nothing could permanently rouse him. Even when Adrienne recurred to the topic of "duty" he let it pass unchallenged. That this mildness was the result of profound preoccupation, was proved a little later in the day when he and Adrienne strolled together to the beach, Harry flinging himself at full length against the pebble-ridge below Fir Dell, and throwing stones into the water. Deceived by his previous calmness, Adrienne had been trying to show him how mistaken he was in his views of

life, and especially in his interpretation of the natural destiny of woman.

"Her most sacred duty, dear Harry"——

"*Damn!*" The monosyllable was breathed *sotto voce*, but with suppressed ferocity, into the shingle. Then the culprit hastily pulled his hat over his eyes, and rolled over out of earshot.

Adrienne had not caught the smothered "language of imprecation," but she was none the less alarmed at his behaviour. He continued to lie at full length on the shingle, with his cap pulled over his eyes in a manner that Adrienne thought denoted a shocking state of self-abandonment. What had come to him? She looked up to the distant castle for inspiration, but the long rows of high windows only reminded her of another strange and perturbed spirit, imprisoned therein. Suddenly Harry sat bolt upright, his cap still very much awry and his hair extravagantly ruffled. Adrienne followed the direction in which he was gazing. A figure was seen descending the pathway through the pine-woods from Fir Dell. Harry shaded his eyes and strained them anxiously.

"Who is it?" asked Adrienne.

"Mrs. Lincoln."

"Oh, let me go!" exclaimed Adrienne, hastily jumping up.

Harry gave a grim smile. It amused him that his sister shrank from meeting a woman who had dared the enmity of the world rather than remain in the position which Adrienne was about to accept deliberately, with her eyes open.

"You had better come and speak to her," said Harry. "She will enlarge your mind."

"I will never willingly enter that woman's presence again!" Adrienne cried. "Good-bye. I am going home; won't you come? *Do* come."

"I want to see Mrs. Lincoln," Harry answered.

Adrienne sorrowfully left him, and when she was quite alone, she gave way to a fit of ladylike weeping, in a neat methodical manner, afterwards drying her eyes and putting aside her handkerchief in good time before reaching the village. Meanwhile Harry and Sibella had met and were moving together closer to the sea.

"It is as we feared," said Harry. "The blow has fallen; my mother and sister are penniless."

"I was sure of it. And your sister is engaged to be married to Bob Hunter; you need not tell me. I am grieved. Fortunately your sister has an obedient soul. The marriage service—strange to say—will reassure her. For her own sake this is devoutly to be wished. How

does all this bear on your own affairs? Must you wait for the wedding?"

Harry explained that it was to take place in ten days, and that he must, of course, be present. He felt that he ought to stay with his mother till the couple returned to their home. After that Mrs. Dixie would go to them. Bob had fortunately accepted his mother-in-law with a light heart.

It was accordingly arranged that Harry should go to town as soon as the bride and bridegroom returned, that he should come back next day, not to Upton, but to a little country station farther along the coast called Shepherd's Nook. Thence he could easily walk by the shore to the castle, reaching it at the time appointed. Sibella—who had found out from Philip that he was to be absent for three days at that time—was to obtain from Caleb the loan of his boat: the very boat in which Viola and Harry had made that other less momentous journey before her marriage,—and in that they were to put off, under cover of the dusk, and evade pursuit, if any should be offered. They would land and take the train to Southampton, and thence get over to France, if possible, on the same evening.

The details of this project were further discussed and all things arranged, subject to Viola's consent, even to the day and the hour.

"This unexpected delay worries me," said Harry. "It seems ill-omened."

"It is not very long," Sibella answered cheeringly. "The time will soon pass—sixteen days; why, it is nothing!"

"One does not know what may happen in sixteen days."

The twilight was creeping round them, the waves beating monotonously on the patient shore. A belated gull floated overhead, uttering its shrill cry. There was an expression of feverish anxiety in Harry's face as he raised his eyes toward the dim outlines of the castle, which the darkness was gradually obliterating.

"Caleb said this morning, that though it may be good to resist evil laws and conventions for the sake of others, the rebel himself inevitably gets trampled on, and generally by those whom he tries to rescue. Are we preparing martyrdom for Viola?"

"Remember what she now suffers," said Sibella.

"If I but knew what these slow, endless days would bring about!"

"If we knew all that was coming in our life, how many of us would consent to live it out? You will see her this afternoon, remember."

"If she is not there"——

"I think that she will be there," said Sibella.

. . . . . .

The big stable-yard clock struck four. The appointment was at half-past four. Philip sat in the library writing letters; he had said nothing about intending to go out, and looked as if he had settled down for the afternoon. Viola, like an uneasy spirit, wandered from room to room and from window to window, unable to keep still for a moment. It was a grey afternoon, and a mist was streaming inland from the sea. Maria, purring before the anteroom fire, looked the emblem of placid contentment.

"O Maria! why can't I take things as you do, you sensible animal?"

Maria blinked.

"He has hurt us both, but you blink and purr before the fire, and make the best of things, while I let the thought of it eat into me and drive me mad. Foolish, isn't it, dear? You are a model of what a respectable cat or a wife should be, and the more there are who follow your example the fewer the broken hearts! Wise Maria!"

Viola was down on the hearth-rug with her arm round the sleepy animal, who purred a soft acknowledgment of the attention. A step on the carpet made the cat dart deftly away, to hide behind the sofa—wide awake now and wary.

"I am going out for a short time this afternoon," said Philip. "I hope you won't feel lonely in my absence." This was said with an abundant display of white teeth.

"No, thank you."

"You had better fill up the tedious interval till my return with a round of calls."

"I don't think I have any calls to pay."

"Excuse me; Mrs. Russel Courtenay reproaches you every time we meet her for not having been to see her, and I am sure there is a long-standing debt to Mrs. Pellett. I will order the carriage for you."

"Oh no, please don't," said Viola; "I can get on for another day or two without seeing Mrs. Courtenay or Mrs. Pellett."

"If you don't care to do it for your own sake, you might remember that your neglect of social duties is a great handicap to me."

"Some other day I will call," she said.

"Well, I warn you not to be up to any mischief. You will regret it if you do." And with that he left her.

Did he know? Viola hastened upstairs for her hat, and on the threshold she encountered Mrs. Barber.

"What do you want?" Viola asked sharply.

"Excuse me, ma'am; only to know if Maria was with you?"

"Yes, of course she was with me; you know she always is at this time. Be kind enough not to intrude on such trifling pretexts another time."

She evidently was not to be allowed to leave without the housekeeper's knowledge. Would it be wise to go at all? It had now begun to rain heavily; her leaving the house in spite of the bad weather would excite suspicion. Viola weighed the matter in her mind very carefully, and came first to one decision and then to another. Inclination insisted clamorously that the appointment should be kept. She trembled with happiness at the thought of it. But a thousand fears and scruples still pulled the other way. At last she flung them all aside in desperation, and made a firm resolve: come what might, she would go. There was danger and misery in each direction. Boldness might best solve the problem after all. Anyhow she would go. She determined to leave the house by the door of the west wing, as that led on to the terrace and was more secluded. She might thus escape the vigilance of her jailer. She glided down the stairs in her black cloak, ghostly and white with excitement. At the foot stood once more the sentinel of Fate—Mrs. Barber! Viola gave an angry exclamation.

"Going out, ma'am, on such an afternoon! Do you

really think, ma'am—excuse the liberty—as it's quite conducive?"

"Be good enough to let me judge for myself," said Viola, too excited to smile.

"You will at least take an umbrella, then," said the housekeeper.

Viola accepted the suggestion, and hurried out. Either she must have lost her head in her excitement, or she had, in good earnest, resolved to dare everything and take the consequences, for without finding out whether or not Mrs. Barber were watching her still, she walked straight towards the appointed spot, in the direction of the coast-guard station. It seemed to her, as she moved rapidly across the wet grass, with the rain in her face, that she was being driven by some external power to her fate, and had nothing to do with her own act or its consequences. The downs stretched far away, with their veil of rain drifting with the wind, the sea-sound mourning on for ever. These wild bleak stretches were like the Eternity into which Viola felt that she was hastening; the sense of personal identity half-swallowed up in some larger sense which made her despairingly resigned to whatever might be on its way to her through the mist. Excitement ran so high that it had risen to a sort of unnatural calm; she was

in the centre of a cyclone; everything was unreal, vision-like; the whole scene and action appeared as a dream from which she must awake to regain the power of will. As she came in sight of the appointed spot in the hollow of the downs, behind the shelter of a group of furze-bushes, she strained her eyes, in hopes of discerning the expected figure. Expected as it was, however, there was a thrill of joyful and unreasonable surprise on seeing what she looked for. From motives of prudence, Harry did not advance to meet her, but when she came drifting up to him, shadow-like, through the now driving rain, he held out his arms, without a word or a moment's hesitation, and drew her into his embrace.

At his touch something in her heart seemed to snap; the strain yielded, and she broke into deep convulsive sobs, perfectly silent.

He soothed her, very quietly, very tenderly, saying little, for he saw how overstrained and excited she was. He drew her head down on his shoulder, and made her rest there; Viola absolutely passive, as if she had lost all power of will. The sobs gradually ceased, and she lay resting quietly exactly as he held her, listening still in a dream, to his words of comfort and love and hope. He told her that in a very little while the misery would be over; that

for her sake he was ready to face anything; the whole world was before them, and, hard as it was and cruel as it was, his love should stand always between her and the worst that lay in its power against her. Let her only trust to him. He explained the plan which he and Sibella had made, and finally he suggested the day and the hour for the flight.

She lay quite still, listening to him, the tumult and feeling of guilt all gone, and in their place a sense of peace, and of deep, almost fathomless joy.

All around them across the downs the rain was sweeping, the wind rising each moment and lashing the sea into angrier storm. The gloom and passion of day seemed like an echo of their own fate.

"Come what may, these moments have been ours," he said, looking down into her eyes, which were dark and soft with the ecstasy of self-abandonment. "You will hesitate no longer?"

"No longer," she answered. "When I am with you it seems right and true: the sin of it vanishes. I feel that nothing is of any value without you. I leave behind me no loving heart to be crushed and wounded; with you I fear nothing; for you I would do or risk anything. Are you satisfied now?"

His arms tightened round her and their lips met in a long never-satisfied kiss. At that instant, as if in sympathy, the wind leapt up with a fresh gust and swept furiously over the downs. They could hear, the next minute, the breaking of a gigantic wave against the cliff's foot, the scattering of the spray, and then the hoarse resurgence into the deep. To Viola it all spoke in parables.

"If anything happens to part us——" she said dreamily.

"Don't talk of such a possibility."

"Still there will always be the memory of to-night; it will be enough for me even—even if we see each other for the last time. It seems now that I have known the supreme earthly joy, and what more can one ask for?"

"That it should not be so fleeting! Viola, you must not speak about seeing each other for the last time; I can't face such a thought. I am greedy for happiness. As for you, you need it as a flower needs sunshine, and I mean that you shall have it!"

Suddenly a human voice rang above the sounds of wind and rain; the dream abruptly ended, and they found themselves confronted by a pair of startled, bewildered blue eyes.

"*Dorothy!*"

The girl turned alternately very red and very white, and

began to stammer some confused remarks about coming to call at the castle,—Mrs. Barber had directed her here—she was very sorry—didn't know—couldn't imagine; and then she fairly broke down.

Neither Harry nor Viola looked in the least like a surprised culprit.

"You know our secret," said Harry; "what do you mean to do with it?"

Dorothy burst into tears.

Viola stood beside her, looking troubled, but scarcely realising yet what had happened. Strangely enough the idea of the secret being disclosed did not distress her much. She had been so deeply hurt and wounded, so miserable and desperate, that the thought of a public scandal, and even of Philip's vengeance, did not fill her with extreme terror. It was just another misery that would have to be borne. But when it became clear that she had lost Dorothy's friendship, the sorrow began in good earnest. To forfeit the girl's love and respect, to fall from the giddy pinnacle where the little hero-worshipper had placed her, down to the lowest depths of infamy—this was to Viola beyond all comparison more painful than the prospect of the scorn of all the outer world put together. As for poor Dorothy, she was weeping as if her heart would break.

If every human creature, man, woman and child, had accused her idol of this sin, Dorothy would have contemptuously denied and disbelieved the accusation. Viola could do no wrong—and now!—it was unbearable, unbelievable. The storm of tears broke out afresh.

"Have I not warned you, Dorothy? Have I not told you that I was capable of wickedness?"

"This is no wickedness," interposed Harry.

"And you would not believe me."

"But I never thought of such a thing as—as this!" she cried tearfully. "Oh! how *could* you? how *could* you?"

"If you knew our story and understood things a little better," said Harry, "you would perhaps come to see that your friend is true to herself in acting in defiance of the world; anyhow it is not for you to reproach her or to judge her."

Dorothy swung round upon him like a tigress.

"It is you, it is *you*, you wicked, deceitful man! How dare you tempt her to do wrong? I think men are all fiends!" cried the girl, almost choked with her own vehemence. "It is all your fault; every bit of it. You are a villain—a black-hearted villain! I hate you! I believe you are the devil!"

"Whether or not I am the devil," said Harry, smiling slightly, "I certainly am the person to blame in this matter, if blame there be. I should like to know how you intend to use your knowledge of our secret. If you mean to divulge it, it is only fair to prepare us."

"Oh! let her tell everything!" Viola exclaimed. "What does it matter? There is no real hope for the future. Let the end come quickly."

For the first time Dorothy allowed her eyes to rest on her friend's face. "Do you repent? Are you sorry?" she asked plaintively.

"No," Viola answered with decision. "I am glad. You will soon forget me, Dorothy; you will find that after all Mrs. Pellett is a safer person to have to do with, and you will cease to grieve for me."

"I hate Mrs. Pellett!" cried Dorothy ferociously, "and I never was so miserable in all my life!—*never!* I wish you were dead—and good—rather than this! Why didn't you die while you were good?"

"Rather, why was I ever born?" cried Viola impetuously. "What does God want with creatures foredoomed to misfortune, foredoomed to sin, foredoomed to be torn in pieces between faith and doubt, impulse and tyranny, duty and passion? Why does He plant feelings strong as death

in our hearts, and then call it sin when we yield to them? Why does He fling wretched, struggling, bewildered creatures into an ocean in full storm, and then punish them fiercely because they don't make way against the tempest? It is cruel, it is absurd, it is unreasonable! He drives His creatures to despair! He asks what is impossible, and He punishes like a fiend. God can never have suffered Himself or He would not be so hard and unmerciful! No one is fit to be God who has not suffered."

She stopped breathless.

Dorothy, with the tears still glistening in her eyes, was gazing at her friend in alarmed bewilderment. A Vicar's daughter might well tremble at such an outburst! She began, however, to perceive the desperation in Viola's mood—nothing short of it could have driven her to such utterance—and to recognise that there were secrets in her life which had brought her to her present sin and disobedience. She had been sorely beset and tempted. What right had any one to judge? She would repent and return to her duty; she was too sweet and noble to forget it for long. Dorothy felt her heart beginning to overflow again towards her friend.

"Oh! tell me you repent," she said imploringly; "only tell me you repent."

"I do not repent," said Viola, with a sad little head-shake.

"Well, I can't help it!" exclaimed Dorothy, going up to her and flinging her arms round her neck. "Good or bad, right or wrong, I love you, and I can't stop loving you. You are always my dear beautiful one, and I will never desert you, let them say what they will. I will defy them all. If you have done wrong, you are very miserable; and you may be very lonely, and I will always come to you. I don't care!" Dorothy went on, apostrophising an imaginary audience who were remonstrating—"I don't care; she is more worth loving, sin or no sin, than all the rest of you with your virtues, put together! If Mrs. Pellett says nasty things, I will—I will *trample* upon her," pursued poor Dorothy, grinding her teeth.

"Oh! my dear, faithful little friend, you don't know what you are saying; we can never see one another again after —after people begin to speak ill of me. They would speak ill of you too if we were ever to meet."

Her voice trembled, and her kiss was long and tender and sad, as a kiss of farewell in which there is no hope.

Dorothy returned it passionately.

"It is *not* the last; it *shall* not be the last! You will repent and everything will blow over. But if you don't, I

shall stick to you and love you always, whatever you may do. Remember that if all the world deserts you, if Mr. Lancaster deserts you, *I* shall never desert you. Send for me whenever you are sad or lonely and I shall come to you. You don't know me; you don't know how I love you. To-day when I found this out I was so miserable, only because I loved you. But whatever you may do, I shall always love you and be true to you! And this is not good-bye; I won't consent to say that hateful word till we die, and even then I won't believe it is parting for ever. Heaven would be no heaven for me if you were not there! —not with all the harps and the psalms that they could get together! If it's wicked, it's the truth—and I can't help it."

It was some time before Dorothy calmed down sufficiently to yield to Harry's suggestion that it would be well for her to return home before it became too dark.

The lateness of the hour made Viola give a little start of alarm. She ought to have been home before now. If Philip had returned, the danger of discovery would be increased by the delay.

Viola laid her hand in Harry's in farewell.

He bent down and kissed her, disregarding the presence of Dorothy.

"It is all settled, then," he said, under his breath. "You will make no mistake. Wednesday, the 24th, at ten o'clock, at the door of the west wing, unless we send a message through Caleb to announce any alteration of plan. If you should wish to communicate with me, do so also through Caleb. Be brave; almost everything depends upon you. My whole life is now in your hands, as well as your own future."

He looked white and haggard as he bade her a lingering good-bye, and watched the two figures hurrying side by side across the uplands. He saw them part at about a hundred yards from the castle, Dorothy trending off to the right towards the village.

Viola looked back just before entering the house, and Harry knew that her eyes were straining through the dusk to where he stood; then she turned and passed across the threshold out of his sight.

. . . . . .

Viola found tea awaiting her in the anteroom as usual. Maria welcomed her with much purring and arching of the back. On her way downstairs, after changing her wet clothing for something dry, she saw the library-door standing open, and concluded that Philip had not returned. When he did return he would question her. What answers could

she give? She felt a strong inclination to own frankly that she had met Harry. She had once made a declaration of war to Philip and warned him not to trust her. Why might she not say boldly, "Yes, I have met Harry Lancaster"?

Then came a qualm of fear. Philip had said that if he found it necessary he would not shrink from placing her under lock and key. He would swear that she was mad; he would put her in charge of a keeper; he would do anything, in short, which her conduct made necessary; so he had plainly told her. Dangerous work indeed to openly defy Philip Dendraith, and not less difficult to defy him in secret.

Half-an-hour later the front-door opened, and closed; Philip entered, and Maria left the room.

Viola felt a thrill go through her from head to foot.

Philip seemed preoccupied. What had Mrs. Lincoln been saying to him, that he, of all people, should become absent-minded? He sat down to the table and poured himself out cup after cup of tea. It had been standing so long that it was black and bitter, but he did not seem to notice it, *connoisseur* though he was. He roused himself presently, and asked what Viola had been doing all the afternoon.

"I have been out," she said.

"Calling?" he inquired.

"No; it was settled that I was not to call to-day."

"Oh! was it?"

"You have been longer than you expected, have you not?" said Viola, with a glance at his preoccupied face, over which, now and then, a pleased smile flitted.

"Perhaps I have—what's the time? Dear me, six o'clock! I had no idea it was so late."

He poured out another cup of tea and drank it off. Then he rose.

"I shall be in the library till dinner," he said.

Viola could scarcely believe that the dangerous interview had passed off so easily. At dinner, to her relief, the subject was not resumed. Husband and wife spent together another of the long gloomy evenings which Viola always so much dreaded. How many more of them were to come? Exactly sixteen if—— Ah! that terrible "if." She paled at the thought of all that it implied.

Facing one another at their solemn dinner-table, waited on by the ever-faithful Cupid, exchanging now and then a few indifferent remarks, they pursued their own thoughts, and lived their divided lives, while the eyes of fading

portraits watched them, always with their look of cynical amusement.

After dinner Viola passed across the echoing hall to the vast drawing-room, Maria, as usual, gliding in after her. The window was open, and let in the salt wind from the sea. Gazing out into the darkness, Viola struggled to realise that her fate was now actually decided; that the crisis of her life was close at hand; that every detail of conduct and circumstance might at any moment change the course of the whole future.

Memories of the afternoon jostled one another in her brain. Her heart-beats quickened at the remembrance of the interview, with all its dream-like joy and bewilderment. Harry could not complain now of a want of return to his devotion. Viola did nothing by halves. Once fully roused, her love was strong, passionate and unchanging. A transitory affection was not in her nature. Whatsoever had been taken once into her heart was taken into it for ever. The same elements of character which made her capable on occasion of a fury perfectly blind in its vehemence, gave her also the capacity for an infinite devotion and for absolute constancy. Harry had reason to rejoice. Viola was shaken completely out of herself; the magic chord had been struck, and her whole being was set in vibra-

tion. Doubts, hesitations, were swept away; feebler currents daring to approach the edges of the tempest, were caught and overpowered and utterly destroyed.

The depth and passion and sadness of the sea had perhaps taught their lesson to the sensitive spirit; there was something in the strength and untameableness of her emotions, when once excited, that strangely resembled the ocean in its gloomier moods. Her intense love of the sea, whose voice was in her ears day and night, whose every aspect was familiar, could not have played so large a part in her life without leaving an indelible mark upon her character. Her instinctive fatalism might have been the lesson of unresting tides, of the waves, for ever advancing and retreating, blindly obedient, in spite of their resistless power and their vast dominion.

Viola leant out into the darkness and stretched out her arms, as she used to do in childhood, longingly towards the ocean. She was a child again in spirit, in spite of all she had passed through since that midnight years ago, when she sat by the open window peering into the mysteries, and yearning to throw herself down by the water's edge and let the waves come up to her and comfort her. Now she had just the same wild longing to fling herself upon the bosom of the great sea, the same childish belief in the

healing-power of that tameless giant in whom might and gentleness were so strangely blended.

And now she was to leave this life-long friend; the hoarse voices of the waves would haunt her dreams no more. Tears of regret came into her eyes. Even this vault-like old house, with its cavernous echoes, its gaunt passages, its unutterable melancholy, had become strangely, almost unwholesomely attractive, as such places will to the spirit that they are destroying. The mere fact that it had been the scene of so much torture, so much struggle and conflict, endowed it with a sort of sinister fascination. Every nook and corner of the house, and outside, every cleft and cranny where the little sea-plants nestled out of the wind's pathway, had burnt into her brain, etching itself thereon with marvellous fidelity through the corroding action of pain. The simplest objects and harmonies became poems and pictures: the curves of the ivy-tendrils that climbed over the palings of the garden, the movement of the sea-birds, the quivering of a slender little weed that grew high up among the weather-beaten stonework, in a crevice of its own, solitary, pathetic, a deserted, delicate spirit shivering sensitively when the giant winds came sweeping across the entrance of its tiny sanctuary. If some day the shelter should crumble or be destroyed, if some day

the fragile exquisite little plant felt upon it the full blast from the west, would it strengthen in resistance, or would the slender stem snap and the flower be whirled away on the breast of the storm?

Viola's thoughts wandered strangely this evening. Every incident of the afternoon was in her consciousness, while a thousand thoughts and memories danced in will-o'-the-wisp fashion hither and thither through her mind.

Suddenly however, with such vividness that she knew she had never realised the idea before, she saw and understood her own position, with all its peril and its possibilities. The awful uncertainty hung like a cloud of terror over her head. Would the plan fail or succeed? If it failed, what then? And if it succeeded, still what then? It was dark and mysterious as this windy night! What lay hidden in the future, divided from her now by only sixteen dawns and sunsets, yet almost as mystically unknown as the realms beyond the grave?

As her eyes continued gazing into the dusk, a strange change seemed to come over the face of the waters, and she felt herself thrill with nameless horror. This great grey tossing ocean appeared to be moving rapidly from west to east in volumes indescribably vast, as if it were being sucked away by some distant whirlpool; and it

went sweeping on and on, with dreadful steady swiftness, till of a sudden it came to the edge of a bottomless abyss, into which it rushed headlong with a wild roar, dragging after it the waters from all the seas and all the rivers in the world. And as it fell down and down into the black Infinite, the awful roar gradually died away, and the water fell and fell, in perfect darkness and perfect silence—for ever!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LAST DAYS.

"LOVE not pleasure; love God. This is the everlasting Yea, wherein all contradiction is solved; wherein whoso walks it is well with him."

Through what freak of memory had these words been stirred up in the mind where they were resting apparently harmless and inactive?

"*This is the everlasting Yea.*"

It was as if a prophet stood in the pathway warning back. No matter! she would go on. Harry was there beckoning; there was a desperate delight in risking all for him. If she had to suffer for it, the suffering would be for him! She *had* loved God once, or she had tried hard to do so, but there was always something unreal about this loving God; Viola did not believe now that she ever *had* actually loved Him after all.

The promises her mother used to speak about had all proved empty and hollow; her own fault, no doubt; but

she knew not how to mend it. If she had to be punished for refusing to submit to what was to her beyond endurance, for choosing, in defiance of law, the supreme earthly happiness—well, she must look her fate in the face and accept the inevitable. A woman stands always between the devil and the deep sea. She must make her choice.

> "I myself am Heav'n and Hell,
> Heav'n but the vision of fulfill'd Desire,
> And Hell the shadow of a soul on fire."

Viola's belief in Hell was far more absolute than that of many who fancy that they hold the doctrine in all firmness of orthodoxy. She, who had known the atrocious torment of a soul bound close and fast to the Intolerable, had no difficulty in believing in eternal punishment. Had she not herself known the pains of hell in that long torture whose memory clung round her burning and blazing, only to be quenched with the consciousness of personal identity? The dreadful sixteen days were slowly creeping on; but oh how slowly! It rained incessantly—steady drifting rain, sweeping over the grey sea, and beating a perpetual summons on the westward window-panes. The only break to the feverish monotony was a visit from Dorothy, who came to assure Viola once more of her unalterable devotion.

"I warn you again not to believe in me," said Viola; "even your faithfulness will falter at what I am capable of."

Dorothy shook her head.

"I hope you will do nothing dreadful; but if you did, it would make no difference, not even if you murdered a few people!" she added, laughing. "I should know that they deserved it."

Once Adrienne and Bob Hunter called when those deliberate sixteen days had marched past to about half their number; eight behind and eight yet to come. Adrienne was absorbed in the wedding preparations, or seemed to be so; Bob evidently proud and happy, and more than ever liable to athletic sports, though he now sometimes stopped abruptly and apologised. Adrienne had apparently been cruel enough to discourage his pirouettes.

"And you won't be late on Friday, will you?" she said in parting; "and, Viola dear, I am looking forward to having you for a long, long visit as soon as we return home. You will be sure to come, won't you?"

"Oh, you won't care to have me so soon," said Viola, paling a little.

"Nonsense; that's just what I long for. For one thing, I don't want Bob to get tired of me!"

Bob pirouetted in a manner which expressed remonstrance.

"One of adamant, you fail to appreciate the good taste of him who adores you to distraction."

"Come away, Bob," said Adrienne, "you are beginning to be tiresome again. Now *don't* stand on one toe; you are really too dreadfully like a *première danseuse!*"

Bob, unable to resist the temptation, tripped lightly across the drawing-room, and arrived at the fireplace on tiptoe, with one foot in the air and a most engaging smile irradiating his pale primrose countenance. For this offence he was hurried away amid some laughter by his betrothed.

A couple of days later Bob and Adrienne were standing together before the altar of Upton Church. The bride was calm and quiet, and rather pale; Bob cheery and affable. Viola looked paler than the bride, and her pallor was the more remarkable from the fact that her next neighbour happened to be Dorothy, with her rosy face beaming—like a harvest-moon, said her brothers. Mrs. Dixie, magnificent and gracious, her ancestor still at her throat, presented another extraordinary contrast to Viola, whose white face, framed by the carving of the old oak stalls, had a look of sad aloofness almost unearthly. Harry, lifting his eyes to hers for a moment, read with a pang of bitter pain the

story that was written in the face. It was a momentary glimpse into the depths of a soul; a glimpse such as is vouchsafed to us, fortunately perhaps, only at rare intervals. He felt that he had never really understood her grief, her conflict, and all the darkness and lonely horror of her life until this moment. The attitude and the expression told the whole history in a flash. A fierce desire burnt in him to do some bodily injury to Viola's father, who stood, a serene and comfortable wedding-guest, between Mrs. Pellett and Mrs. Russel. Courtenay, occasionally whispering pleasantly into the ear of Mrs. Courtenay. Philip, handsome and exquisite, excited in Harry an even greater yearning to inflict a summary punishment. Philip looked deliberately round on one occasion, as if he felt the vengeful impulse directed against him; he gave a cool stare, and just at the end a singular little gleam of a smile which made his adversary feel uncomfortable.

"Till death do us part."

Philip looked across at his wife. She felt the look, but would not meet it. She knew that it was a taunt, a reminder that she was his till death; that no plots or efforts within her power were sufficient to release her. She knew his delight in making her feel the fruitlessness of resistance. The instinct to torture was strong in the man.

He belonged to a type which flourished in appalling perfection at the time of the Italian Renaissance. Possibly it was part of his policy to frighten Viola into a belief in his ability to frustrate any design that she might form. He knew how paralysing to effort is such a belief, and how far more easily his wife would betray her secrets if she were overwhelmed with a baffling conviction that it was useless to try to conceal them.

After the service Mr. Evans mercilessly gave the bride and bridegroom a homily at the altar, in which he enlarged eloquently on the wife's mission, the duty of subordination to her husband and devotion to the sacred cares of home. He spoke of the duty of the husband to cherish and love his wife, to guide, direct, and strengthen her, supplying the qualities which she lacked and making of married life a duet of perfect harmony.

Then came the signing of names, the usual congratulations, and the return to the Cottage before the departure of the wedded pair. The little drawing-room was crowded with guests, Mrs. Dixie doing the honours with indescribable pride and delight. Viola looked round at the familiar faces, feeling that she stood among the actors of her little world for the last time. In the future they would know her no more. Their part in her destiny was over for ever

Before another week had ended she would be on the other side of an impassable gulf, deep and dark as life itself! She sat leaning back, watching the crowd with a strange interest. It was incredible that what had been planned could come to pass. These wedding-guests reduced the whole scheme to dreamland; they banished into the vast realms of Impossibility all things which wandered out of the line of their daily pathways. One could scarcely look at them and continue to believe. Arabella was there, stylish and writhing, and Mrs. Pellett still busy making virtue repulsive; Mr. Pellett, dragged to the festivity against his will, looked, in the glare of publicity, as unhappy as an owl at midday. Mrs. Evans was present, and supremely uncomfortable in that strange assortment of garments wherewith she did heroic honour to the weddings and garden parties of the Upton world; her husband indulged in clerical jocularities with some of the livelier members of the party; while Dick and Geoffrey (who was just home on leave) talked about trout-fishing in a corner.

The last time; the last time!

Dick came up for a talk (the last talk), friendly and frank as usual.

Dorothy was watching Viola with great anxiety. Harry, from motives of prudence, had held aloof, but the girl

was evidently afraid that, sooner or later, somebody would guess their dreadful secret.

There was no doubt that Arabella still had her suspicions. She talked a great deal to Harry, and very often about Viola. But Harry might have been discussing the attractions of the Queen of the Cannibal Islands for all that Arabella could gather from his replies.

She presently transferred her notice to Philip.

"I always think a wedding is so depressing. Don't you, Mr. Dendraith? I am sure your sweet wife agrees with me."

"My wife, I am convinced, agrees with you in everything."

"Oh! now, Mr. Dendraith, you are too bad; I am sure she regards me as very frivolous; but about weddings I do think she would support my view."

"I am sorry to see you so cynical," said Philip.

"Oh, I am not so much cynical as observant," Arabella retorted. "When I look round among my friends and acquaintances, I cannot find more than one or two happy marriages in the whole circle. I believe it's because men *will* smoke so much."

"The whole secret," said Philip. "My wife won't let me smoke more than two cigars a day."

"Really! How wise of her, and how nice of you to be

so obedient! Men are generally so very wilful, you know. I shall really have to consult Mrs. Dendraith about her system of management. You seem to be in perfect order, and yet not crushed."

"Not at all crushed," said Philip. "My wife says she doesn't like to see a man's spirit broken."

Arabella laughed. ("He rules her with a rod of iron," she said to herself, "and she lives in deadly fear of him.") "Oh, Mr. Dendraith, I want you and Mrs. Dendraith to come over to tea with me next Tuesday. There are one or two people coming whom I should like you to meet."

"Thank you," Philip answered. "I should have enjoyed it immensely, but on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday I shall be in town. I have had engagements for some time."

"Now, I am certain they are of mushroom growth," cried Arabella; "it is very unkind. You and Mrs. Dendraith never *will* come and see me."

"I assure you I am speaking the literal truth; you might have known that from my dulness. How can you be so suspicious? Cynical again. Viola, my dear, Mrs. Courtenay declares that I am manufacturing engagements. Can't you testify to the antiquity of my appointments for Tuesday and Wednesday of next week?"

Viola confirmed her husband's statement.

"Well, I suppose I must forgive you, if that's the case; but it's very tiresome of you. I am glad to find you tell your wife of all your engagements: without, as you say, breaking your spirit, she is evidently very firm with you."

"She is," said Philip; "but I know it is for my good."

The bride now began to bid farewell to her friends, before departing in her ladylike grey dress which every one said was so becoming. She behaved with great self-possession, though one could see that she was moved. Mrs. Dixie folded her in a vast embrace, from which Adrienne emerged rather less exquisitely smooth than when she entered, leaving her mother weeping with great assiduity and much lace pocket-handkerchief. They were genuine tears that she shed, although this was one of the happiest days of her life!

When the bride came to Viola she gave her a long heart-felt kiss.

"Be brave and true to yourself, dear," she whispered.

"Good-bye, good-bye!" Viola returned.

"We shall soon meet again," said Adrienne, with a cheerful nod, passing on to Dorothy.

"Good-bye," repeated Viola.

In how short a time was Adrienne to look back at that parting with a shudder of disgust; in how short a time was the memory that once she had called Viola Dendraith friend to be thrust aside, whenever it intruded, with horror and dismay! A life of smooth prosperity and domestic contentment was the reward of Adrienne's action at this crisis of her career, and every day of her well-appointed existence sent her drifting farther in spirit from the tortured, desperate, bewildered creature whose straying footsteps she had so earnestly sought to guide in straighter pathways, whose faults she had so conscientiously striven to correct. Adrienne had the consoling thought that she had, at any rate, done her best to save her erring friend from the abyss of guilt and ruin towards which she had been drifting.

After the departure of the bride and bridegroom the guests began to leave. Dorothy came up to Viola and folded her in a Herculean embrace.

"You are worth all the rest of them put together!" she exclaimed. "I have been watching them and all their airs and graces." Dorothy gave a gesture of contempt. "They look so silly!" she said, with severe energy. "They mince and wriggle, and snip and sniggle, and go on like marionettes who have got wires where their souls

ought to be! And you!—you seem like a beautiful calm statue among all these fidgeting dolls!"

"O Dorothy, you *are* extravagant!" Viola exclaimed, with a sad little smile.

"No, I am only telling the exact truth," said Dorothy.

"Are you coming, dear?" her mother called to her.

Mrs. Evans shook hands with Viola, and said she hoped that she would come and see them soon at the Rectory; it was so long since she had been there. Then she passed on to collect the rest of her daughters.

"Good-bye," said Dorothy, with another fervent embrace. "You won't do anything dreadful, will you?" she whispered pleadingly. "Please, please don't. But if you do it will make no difference. I shall love you always."

"Dear Dorothy, you must—— Ah! good-bye, and go," cried Viola, with a break in her voice, as she kissed the girl and thrust her hastily away, for she felt her self-command begin to fail.

Dorothy gave a parting look and smile and followed her mother from the room. And in a few days even *that* loving and faithful heart had turned against the miserable woman who now watched her depart, knowing that they had met for the last time, and that love itself would presently stand back and pass by on the other side. The time was at hand

when Dorothy would tear the memory of her idol from her heart with horror and anguish. The time was at hand when she would catch her breath at the mention of Viola's name, turning aside in miserable silence as it was tossed about from mouth to mouth with insult and execration.

Suddenly, as Viola remained with her eyes fixed on the spot where she had seen Dorothy for the last time, that strange image of hastening waters appeared again before her mind's eye, almost as vividly as when she had stood at the window looking out to sea. Again there was the mysterious stir; again the whole ocean seemed to be drawn away and away from west to east, towards a bottomless gulf, which was drinking up all the seas and rivers, sucking in, attracting, constraining, for ever insatiable and for ever empty. With awful tumult and distraction, the waters rushed to their doom, boiling, seething, rebelling in vain against the power that drew them with ever accelerating speed, onwards to the inevitable verge. And then once more, with a bound like that of some wild creature hunted to his death, they leapt over the brink, pouring down and down and down, in one smooth mighty stream, into the infinite darkness and infinite silence for ever.

Viola awoke with a sudden bewildered start, to find Geoffrey standing before her laughing.

"What's the matter, Ila?" he asked. "Are you walking in your sleep? I have asked you a question three times, and you only stared at me with no speculation in your eye. I suppose a wedding *is* a thought-provoking sort of affair to the married."

Geoffrey had by this time fortunately got over his passion for Adrienne, and transferred his affections to Dorothy Evans.

"You will come and see me, Geoffrey," said Viola when, after some further conversation, he said that he must be going.

"Oh yes, of course,—in a day or two. The uncle has offered me some fishing at Clevedon, so I shan't be able to come till Tuesday or Wednesday. When I do I should like to stay the night."

"Do come on Tuesday, then. I want *very* much to see you."

"Why, my dear, of course I shall come as soon as I can. I thought I might perhaps have had an invitation to spend part of my leave with you. I don't wish to push myself—always was retiring. I've got a lot of things I want to talk to you about, Ila," he went on more seriously. "I have been reading Carlyle, and, by Jove!—well we'll talk it over later on. Good-bye just now. The governor's going. I

shall probably call on Wednesday. Tuesday's rather busy."

"Oh! do come on Tuesday," said Viola, glancing swiftly round to make sure that Philip was out of earshot.

"Why do you so particularly want me to come on Tuesday?" asked Geoffrey.

"I would still rather you came to-morrow or on Monday."

"Well, if you're so set upon it, I will try and turn up on one day or the other. Mustn't come on Wednesday on any consideration evidently. Something up on Wednesday. Well, I hope it will go off well and be a grand success. My blessing on you. Good-bye."

Viola wished that Geoffrey's voice were not so exceedingly sonorous and hearty. Yet surely Philip could not have heard what he said from the other end of the room, through the hubbub of talk and laughter. The incident nevertheless made her feel uneasy.

"Now, Viola," said her aunt, coming up and touching her on the shoulder, "why have you never said a word to me all day? You haven't been to see me for three weeks, and now you have a chance of explaining yourself you neglect it. Well, how are you, and what have you been doing, and what are you going to do? You look pale, my

dear. You shut yourself up in that old house and get dull. Now you must really come and see me. I have a friend I want you to know—Arabella's sister, Mabel Turner, but not so foolish as Arabella; one family can't be expected to produce two masterpieces. She is a great horsewoman, ready for anything. She is coming on Wednesday evening, and you must drive over in time for tea and stay the night."

"I fear, Aunt Augusta, I can't do that," cried Viola. "I"——

"Now, my dear, I take no refusal," said Lady Clevedon; "you are getting into stay-at-home ways that are exceedingly bad for you. I simply insist upon your coming to me on Wednesday; so say no more about it."

"But, Aunt Augusta, it is impossible."

"Oh! stuff and nonsense; you have nothing in the world to do. Why can't you come?"

Viola shook her head and tried to turn the subject.

"Now, no more nonsense; you have got to do as you are told. Women are nothing if not obedient. I shall expect you on Wednesday not later than five o'clock. Now, good-bye, my dear."

"Good-bye, Aunt Augusta," Viola said, with a slight unintentional stress on the word. Every parting to-day had for her the sad solemnity of a last farewell.

Her aunt laughed. "One would fancy that Viola was going to mount the scaffold to-morrow," she said.

Before leaving, Lady Clevedon spoke to Philip about his wife's growing dislike to mingling with her fellow-creatures.

"It is really very bad for her, and you ought to check it. I wanted her to come to tea with me next week, but she says it is impossible, which (like a problem in Euclid) is absurd. What can be her reason?"

"She may have Dorothy Evans with her, perhaps, next week, as I am to be be away," said Philip.

"As if she couldn't bring the girl! Tell Viola that I shall expect them both."

Philip delivered the message when he and his wife were driving home across the downs.

"I suppose you will go," he said indifferently.

"I decided not to do so," Viola replied.

"Do you intend never to go anywhere again?"

"Oh no."

"Then why will you not go to your aunt's?"

"Why, after all, should I go? The people there are all so lively and untiring; they oppress me. I am not meant for society."

"I wonder what you *are* meant for."

"A target for other people's wit and other people's cruelty."

"A target that retorts is a novelty," said Philip. "A target has, or ought to have, the Christian's virtue; it turneth the other cheek also."

They drove for the rest of the way home in almost complete silence.

The evening closed in with recurring rain which beat upon the windows of the house with mournful persistence for many stormy hours.

Viola sat by the big fireplace, a book, for appearance' sake in her lap, looking into the fire and thinking, thinking. And outside, the grey sea beat for ever upon the beach. There was no escaping from its voice. It was like a full-toned chorus to the drama of human life, mournful and prophetic.

Poor Adrienne! what were the waves foretelling for her? Would she have to grieve and suffer, or would she settle quietly down to her lot and forget how all the new ease and rest from biting anxiety had been purchased? It was not for herself, it was for her mother's happiness and peace of mind that she had consented. Would that console her? "Every woman has her price," Philip had said. Adrienne's price had been found and paid.

On Sunday morning Geoffrey appeared. "You see I have come to-day," he said, "since you are having high-jinks on Wednesday, to which only the very select are invited. Philip says you aren't going to church, so let us have a talk." Bringing out a tattered volume of Carlyle, he opened it on his knee, drawing up his chair before the fire. He wanted to know what Viola thought of a celebrated passage in "Sartor Resartus" which he read aloud: ''Foolish Soul! What act of Legislature was there that *thou* shouldst be Happy? A little while ago thou hadst no right to *be* at all. What if thou wert born and predestined not to be Happy, but to be Unhappy! Art thou nothing other than a vulture, then, that fliest through the Universe, seeking after somewhat to *eat*, and shrieking dolefully because carrion enough is not given thee? There is in Man a Higher than Love of Happiness; he can do without Happiness, and instead thereby find Blessedness.' Is all that true, do you think?" the young man asked wistfully.

"This," said Viola, "is really our mother's teaching in other words: that we ought to submit to what is sent us to bear, and to aim at something higher than happiness."

"What is Blessedness, do you suppose?" Geoffrey in-

quired. "Can't remember that I ever came across it. Don't know what to make of the passage. Ought we to try to be blessed, and never mind about being happy all our lives? And, Viola, how do you suppose one can set about being blessed? I don't know, for the life of me; and yet it seems as if that doctrine led one on to a high mountain and gave one a grander view of things. I don't know how to express it, of course, but you know what I mean."

Viola looked very thoughtful as she sat gazing into the fire. Was it Fate that had sent her this second message from the great apostle of endurance and heroism?

"Love not pleasure; love God." That was the first message. And now came this second one, "Why shouldst thou be happy?" Were Harry and Sibella mistaken after all? Was it nobler to cast happiness to the winds—accepting the fact that there is indeed no reason why one *should* be happy—than to rebel against circumstances divinely ordered, against the teaching of one's childhood, against the laws of society and of the mighty past?

Viola was always open to teaching of this character; long years had worn a groove in her mind where such thoughts flowed smoothly and familiarly. She was haunted and troubled by them long after Geoffrey had gone. The

ideas on which she had resolved to act were not originally her own; she had not evolved them for herself, she had not built them up from observation and thought, from assimilation of the thoughts of others that were ready to mix with and fructify her own. The ideas were in her mind still as things separate and distinct; they had no long-tried supports to uphold them; they were isolated and unnourished. Such are not the strong buttressed ideas to inspire bold and consistent action. They may dissipate at any moment, and leave the actor lost and desperate, without light or motive, the slave of every impulse, of every turn of event.

The turn of event which helped to decide Viola's fate at this crisis was the conduct of her husband. Philip was not a patient man, nor a forgiving one. Viola's behaviour had exasperated him beyond all bounds, and he showed his resentment by a system of subtle and refined torture, by playing upon his wife's sensitiveness in a manner as ingenious as it was terrible. Every day the rack was screwed tighter, till human endurance could do no more. Viola, whose power of projecting herself into another mind was limited strictly to cases where the mind somewhat resembled her own, had never realised how intensely annoying to Philip her conduct had been; she failed to

understand that any conduct on her part could seriously affect one so cold and strong and self-sufficient as her husband. His contemptuous manner, his apparent determination to humble and humiliate her at every turn and by every device, caused her to imagine that she was powerless to make him wince in return. Had she known that under the repeated evidences of her aversion he was suffering as keenly as a man of his type is capable of suffering, it is possible that the history of her life might have had a different ending. But she did not know, and the drama played itself out inexorably.

Philip's studied insolence and insults after Geoffrey left—indeed before he left—put to flight all effects of reading "Sartor Resartus." There might be something higher than happiness, but it was not to be attained under the same roof with Philip Dendraith ; it was not to be obtained by a woman, who for the sake of food and house-room and social consideration remained his wife : unhappiness one could endure, but degradation and indignity never ! Women in the past had thought it no crime to take their own lives rather than submit to that. Perhaps they were wrong, but Viola's heart leapt up in sympathy towards them. They were her true sisters, in spite of all the years that raised a host of shadows between them. She understood

their desperation; she knew how their hearts had burnt and blazed within them, how death to them had seemed the sweetest thing in all the world!

"Why shouldst thou be happy?" Perhaps there was no good reason. But "Why shouldst thou live to be tortured and insulted?" Was there any better reason for *that?*

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DARKNESS.

During these last slowly moving days Maria followed her mistress everywhere. She would scarcely allow her out of her sight. Perhaps Viola's restlessness may have warned this terribly intelligent animal that something unusual was in the air. The creature seemed to be striving, in her own eloquent fashion, to comfort her mistress and to assure her that under whatever vicissitudes of fortune, she might confidently count upon the support of her dumb and faithful friend.

"Ah! what shall I do without you, my dear?" Viola used to ask sorrowfully. "If I could but take you with me!"——

Still the wild weather continued, rain and wind beating up from the south-west. There were rumours of wrecks along the coast, and at Shepherd's Nook the lifeboat had gone out to save the crew of a sinking vessel.

If on Wednesday it were still so stormy, how would they

be able to effect their escape by sea? Well, no doubt Harry had thought of that, and would have some other plan. It was useless for Viola to trouble about details.

Monday was still stormy, though there were gleams of tearful sunshine lighting up in patches an agitated sea.

"If this rain lasts," said Philip, "I think I shall give up my visit to London."

Viola's face was half-turned from him, but he saw the colour rush into her cheeks.

"I can postpone it till next week if necessary. It will depend on the weather."

Bright sunshine on Tuesday morning decided the question, however. Viola stood on the doorstep watching the phaeton which took Philip to the station growing smaller and smaller, till at last it disappeared in the distance of the sunlit downs. If all went according to plan, she had seen her husband for the last time! There was not one memory in the whole of her married life to make her think of that with compunction or regret! She stood there in the sunshine, with the wind playing round her, long after Philip was out of sight. When she did move, it was not to return to the house, but to wander out into the sunlit garden by the beautiful terraces, where the tendrils of the creepers were nodding and swaying, and the rain-sprinkled cobwebs fringed the pathway

with brilliants. Maria was following, daintily picking her steps along the wet paths, nimbly springing on and off the parapet as her mistress strolled slowly, thoughtfully among the flowers. Only for short intervals during the whole of this day did Viola remain within-doors. In the morning she drove to the Manor-House, to pay the old place and its inhabitants a farewell visit. It was looking its serenest and sweetest. Terrible was the ache at her heart as she strolled once more round the familiar gardens, passed once more through the old rooms, where every nook and corner had vivid associations, where everything spoke of the dead woman who had borne so much and sacrificed so much, and all in vain. What would the mother think of her daughter *now* if she knew? Well, if she knew in good earnest,—not as a limited creature knows, who has only one or two little strings in his nature that vibrate responsively, but as a liberated spirit might be supposed to know, who overlooks the whole field of human emotion,—then Viola thought that her mother would not utterly condemn her.

No nook or corner was left unvisited to-day. Viola bade farewell to all her old friends: Thomas and the under-gardener, and, most heart-breaking of all, to old William whose eyes filled with tears at her words, and perhaps still

more at the tone of reverent affection in which they were uttered.

"It always does me good to see you, Miss—Mum, as I should say! There, I don't believe as there's many like you, more's the pity;—the old place ain't been itself since you left, and never will be. God bless you!"

Viola turned away with tears in her eyes. Within the next few days would he recall his blessing? Would he be against her also? He could not know the how or the why and the impossibility of it all! Would he then take the usual simple course and condemn because he could not understand? Perhaps not. There was something large and generous in the tender old heart; though he might grieve and marvel and shake his head, yet perhaps he would not judge; he would simply leave the matter alone and go his own quiet way, reviling not, but trusting.

Another trying farewell was with Geoffrey, though, like so many pitiful things, it had its comic side. The young fellow was in one of his wildest moods; jovial, hearty, full of life, hope, and spirit. Utterly unconscious, of course, of what was impending, his "Good-bye" was of the most commonplace description. He said that he was coming over to see his sister on Thursday,—not to-morrow, oh no; he remembered the mysterious high-jinks appertaining to

Wednesday, and tactfully forbore to intrude. But on Thursday, when the excitement of the high-jinks had died away, he should claim a little sisterly attention while he a tale unfolded. Geoffrey handed her into the phaeton with a fraternal nod of farewell, but Viola put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"Geoffrey, dear," she said, "we have always been good friends, haven't we?"

"Why, yes, of course, we have," Geoffrey returned, in astonishment. "Who said we haven't? Because if you'll show me the fellow I'll knock him down."

"Oh! I don't want you to knock any one down," said Viola, with a sad little laugh; "I want you only to remember always what good friends we have been and how fond I was of you, and always shall be. And—and think as kindly of me as you can. Good-bye."

She kissed him again, and then before Geoffrey recovered from his astonishment the phaeton was half-way down the avenue.

Towards evening the weather showed ominous signs of a change for the worse. Black clouds were gathering over the sea, and the wind had a sound which the coastguard people knew so well betokened storm.

All promises were fulfilled. This last sleepless night in

the gloomy home was wildly tempestuous. Viola, with every nerve on the stretch, shivering from head to foot, lay counting the hours as they were deliberately tolled out by the great courtyard-clock. She paced up and down her room, when it became impossible any longer to remain still, listening to the familiar sounds of the storm. The night wore itself out; but the rain and wind had only slightly abated by the morning.

Perhaps it was Viola's excited fancy that made her think that Mrs. Barber was more watchful than usual to-day. There was no evading her—or so it seemed. The talent which that respectable person displayed in finding excuses for her presence was as astounding as her admirable acting —if acting it were.

Viola was anxiously on the alert all the morning in case any message should come from Harry. Regardless of Mrs. Barber, she braved wind and rain, and went to the ruin, so that in case Caleb had any note for her, he might deliver it without difficulty. But Caleb was purely and freezingly philosophic this morning; he was absorbed in the Absolute, and had nothing to say on any other subject, unless it were a word or two on the Infinite. A stranger conveyer of a secret correspondence can scarcely be imagined. He appeared to have no curiosity on the subject whatever.

For all one could tell, the philosopher may have thought that he was carrying letters on the subject of the differential calculus. The day wore on, but no message came; the plan was evidently to be carried out as arranged.

The hours were like so many grievous burdens, heavy to endure; but they stole gradually away, the clocks announcing, with what seemed unusual emphasis, the passing of them one by one into eternity. The solitary evening meal was over, and darkness had descended upon land and sea. Viola decided to make herself ready to start, having hat and cloak downstairs, so that in a second she could fling them on and go. It would be well not to leave a moment too soon, because of Mrs. Barber. The moon was rising, but there was fear that the clouds might obscure its light at the critical moment. One thing must be done before leaving, and that was, to take her treasures from the oak cabinet in the west wing: Harry's gift and his letters. She had not dared to take these things before, for fear of Philip's discovering and confiscating them. Once possessed of these, she would hasten down the stairs to the door of the west wing leading on to the terrace, where Harry would be awaiting her.

Again and again Viola found herself overwhelmed with unbelief in the reality of the events which were passing

panorama-like before her. It *could* not be true; it *must* be a gigantic and terrible dream. Presently she would awake and find herself going through the daily routine exactly as before, without hope of release. The hours were drifting on, the throbbing moments passing, passing, till the appointed time began to draw near. Maria was on the hearthrug purring softly. Viola stooped down and lifted the creature in her arms.

"Good-bye, you dear and faithful one, good-bye," she said, burying her face in the soft fur and laying her cheek against it caressingly.

As she stood there with the animal lying in her arms, the door opened softly behind her very slightly, and then closed again as softly. No one entered, and Viola remained unaware of what had occurred. She glanced at the clock.

"I must go," she said, giving the cat a last caress and laying her down again before the fire. Putting on her hat and cloak, she opened the door carefully, looked up and down the passage, and then hurried along past the cynical portraits in the hall, to the door leading to the west wing. Once on the other side of that, she breathed more freely. She hesitated for a moment, and then taking the key from the hall-side of the door, she locked it on the inner side and put the key in her pocket. At least she

would be secure from Mrs. Barber's espionage. She had exactly five minutes to get her treasures and be at the terrace-door to meet Harry as appointed.

A gust of air greeted her as she entered the room. The storm apparently had blown in one of the lozenge window-panes. Viola felt a superstitious thrill of fear, as if the gust had been a warning to her not to cross the threshold. But at the same moment she knew that no warning could retard her now, not even that too familiar moan in the sound of the sea. She advanced towards the cabinet, opened it, and took out the packet of letters and Harry's wedding-gift with trembling fingers. The light of the moon was sufficient to enable her to see what she was doing. She consulted her watch, longing feverishly for the end of this lonely suspense, longing to get once for all beyond the spell-like influence of the house, where she seemed to feel Philip's presence in the very air.

She put the letters in her pocket and took the knife from its hiding-place. How to carry it? She thought for a moment, and then thrust it into the coils of her hair, drawing the hair over it so that the sinister little weapon was almost concealed. She was hurrying towards the door, wondering if it could be possible that she would get safely away, when the doubt was horribly answered; for out of

the darkness a tall familiar form emerged, and without apparent interval, her wrist was gripped by a hand, powerful and merciless. She uttered a stifled shriek, and then a low moan of despair.

"Very well planned for a beginner, my dear; shows a real bent in that direction, which if followed might lead to superior results. One would never suspect you of such things; therein lies your advantage."

Philip still held her wrist between his fingers, which were closed upon it as a vice. The two stood confronting one another thus, Viola white as death, with the hard, set look of a determined and a desperate woman. Philip, with a smile on his face, prepared to enjoy himself.

"Pardon my detaining you," he said, "especially as you are keeping Mr. Lancaster waiting out in the cold on a stormy night like this; it seems inconsiderate. But you can lay the blame on me; say it was entirely my fault, and that I humbly apologise for any inconvenience I may have caused him."

Viola made an effort to free her wrist, but the hard fingers closed round it more tightly.

"Not just yet, if you please; I have so much to talk about. This little plan of yours—I must really repeat my congratulations. I have watched it through all its incipient

stages with unbounded interest. A plan like that is born, not made."

He released her hand, but placed himself with his back to the door, so that she still remained his prisoner.

Viola's eyes were wild and desperate.

"What are you going to do?" she asked. "What punishment have you in store for me?"

"Punishment! How can you talk of punishment?—one who adores you"——

The smile with which he said it, of mockery, triumph, and conscious possession, made the blood mount impetuously to her very temples.

She looked round wildly for a means of escape. The window?

"Fifty feet from the ground, my love; and although no doubt adoring arms would be ready to receive you when you reached *terra firma*, still I should not advise the attempt even in the cause of virtue."

"Can't you say what you mean to do at once, without all these taunts? Surely the fact of your victory is enough for you."

"Certainly; but your curiosity as regards the future seems a little morbid. However, I shall be happy to gratify it. During my visit to town I have secured the

services of a most superior person, who will henceforth be always your cheerful and instructive companion. I hope sincerely that you will agree well with her, as the arrangement is permanent. All preliminaries are now settled, and the superior person will enter upon her duties to-morrow. You ask, perhaps, why I returned to-day instead of to-morrow, as arranged. Simply because I had my reasons for thinking that something was going on. I really am not in a position to afford to lose you thus prematurely. You see, my dear, you are an article of 'vertu' which cannot be easily renewed, a luxury that a man can't afford to repeat too frequently. In point of fact, my dear, if you will excuse my mentioning it, you come rather expensive. The original—consideration was heavy, but that would have been nothing had it stopped there. The truth is, however, that your amiable father still applies to me for money to get him out of disgraceful difficulties, and for the sake of avoiding a family scandal I allow myself to be thus bled with a sweetness of temper which borders on weakness. The outlay appears especially ruinous from the fact that still I am disappointed of an heir, a matter to me of serious moment. All things considered, therefore, my love, you will admit that you have been somewhat of the nature of a sell, and you will pardon my endeavouring to prevent

your bringing the matter to a climax by disgracing yourself and me in this spirited manner. It will not do, believe me; and you must really oblige me by banishing the idea from your mind as an impossibility. I think you will have no difficulty in accomplishing this when you receive the able help of my superior person. After her advent I shall be able to leave you with every confidence and perfect peace of mind. This Pillar of Strength has been accustomed to the care of what are pleasingly termed *mental cases*, and she is therefore as keen and quick as a detective. Charming and most clever is my superior person. I long to introduce her to you. I know you will love her."

"Is your cruelty not satiated yet?" asked Viola at length. "Will you not end this interview and let me go out of your sight? If I am to be a prisoner, show me my dungeon and leave me in peace. Only let me go. I can bear no more."

Philip took a catlike step nearer to her.

"*Dungeon* is an ugly word, my dear; besides, I am far too anxious and devoted to let you out of my sight. No, no; husband and wife are one; there must be no separation. Now you will come with me, my love, not to your dungeon; far from it."

He was looking into her face with a keen, vengeful enjoy-

ment of her torture. Her shrinking movement and low cry seemed to rouse his worst instincts.

"Ah! you may shrink, my dear, but shrinking will not help you. What does it matter to me? You have got to learn once for all to whom you belong. I am not a man to be trifled with, believe me. What is mine is mine. You were about to make a vast mistake on that interesting point, which I am happily in time to rectify. Now is the moment for an impressive lesson, for there must really be no uncertainty in these matters. I am deeply grieved to keep our friend out in the rain all this time, but really, considering the circumstances, I think he can hardly be surprised. A fond husband parted for two days from his wife!"—— He smiled in a particular way that always maddened her as he advanced quickly and took her in his arms, bending down to kiss her as she struggled violently to free herself.

"It's no use struggling, my dear," he said, "for I am considerably stronger than you are, and I intend to stand no nonsense. If it pleases me to kiss you, I shall kiss you. It is my right, gainsay it if you can. I am resolved that you shall understand. You are behaving as a fool, or as a spoilt child, and must be treated as such."

Overcoming her frantic resistance, he kissed her long and steadily on the lips, partly because it pleased him to do

so, partly it seemed, because it tortured her. Then he let her go.

She stood before him mad with fury, and for the moment literally speechless.

"Oh! I could tear myself to pieces," she said wildly.

Philip looked at her and smiled. It was a game of cat and mouse.

"A very pretty and becoming little passion, my dear, which I must quench with kisses. You really can't call me a tyrant, when that is my only form of chastisement. Kisses till you are subdued." He laughed at her desperation, as he advanced once more to inflict the tender punishment (as he called it).

She darted to the window and tried to tear it open, but he followed her, laying his hand upon her arm.

"Couldn't have a suicide in the family on any account, nor can I permit you to summon your lover to the rescue. Really your impetuosity is becoming dangerous. My superior person must hasten. Meanwhile I will cherish you under my own wing, enjoying all the lovely changes of your April moods. What! not subdued yet? More kisses required"——

"Oh! do you want to drive me mad?" cried Viola hoarsely, standing at bay, with her hand on the casement, leaning backwards away from Philip's arm.

"I am inconsiderate," he said, "to keep you parleying here at this time of the night; I will take you to your room. (Oh no, I can't trust you to go alone.) Come with me. As I explained before, I am too affectionately anxious about you to let you out of my sight. And then my mood is tender—in spite of a slight coldness on your part, which I am always in hopes that my persistent devotion will be able to overcome. Allow me."

He put his arm round her to lead her away.

"Don't touch me, don't touch me, I tell you, or I shall go raving mad!"

"I fear that I should be unable to detect the moment of transition," said Philip, calmly persevering.

He stopped abruptly to examine something. "Ah! what's this glittering bauble in your hair? This must come out, and at once."

"Don't touch it!" cried Viola, and her hand was on the hilt of the knife almost at the same instant that Philip's words were uttered. She drew it out and held it behind her defiantly.

"Is the toy so precious? A dangerous plaything, and most unsuitable in the hands of a refractory pupil, undergoing much-needed instruction in the nature and duties of wifehood. Come now, give it up quietly; it will be far

better for you in the end. We must have no violence, if we can possibly avoid it; that sort of thing really is very bad form, and you know my horror of bad form."

He held out his hand for the weapon.

"Don't oblige me to take it from you by force. You must try to realise the situation. If I could make you understand, that somehow or another, by fair means or by foul, I intend to reduce you to submission and that *immediately*, you would save yourself and me a lot of fruitless trouble. Your conduct throughout our married life has been simply intolerable, and we must have an end of it. Women can't be reasoned with; they can only be governed autocratically. You have confirmed my opinion on that subject. Sheer will-force is the only argument that goes home to them. Now then, we understand each other. Give me that offensive weapon and come with me. I have been long enough in this musty and extremely depressing old room, where the family have died for generations; one can sniff death in the very air. Come with me. Let's have no more nonsense to-night. I have no doubt by this time our friend has become tired of waiting, and returned wiser and sadder to his fireside—perhaps also rather damper. But his mother, we all know, is thoughtful about gruel and a hot bath in such cases, so there is really no cause for compunc-

tion on your part. You did your best; he could not ask more. Come with me."

"I will not come with you; I will not pass another night under your roof, though I die for it," said Viola.

"And how are you going to avoid it, my dear?" asked Philip. "The woman doesn't know when she is beaten! What power on earth can protect you now against me? You yourself have locked the door leading to the house, and cut yourself off from chance interposition. Besides, who would help a wife against her husband?"

She kept her eyes fixed upon him, watching every movement, desperate and defiant. He moved close up to her to take possession of the knife and to lead her away.

"Don't touch me, don't touch me, or"——

The rest of the sentence was lost in a sound of loathing and horror, for Philip had disobeyed her. Advancing till she was driven against the corner of the window and there was no possible loophole of escape, he took her in his arms deliberately.

"Don't make a fool of yourself," he said; "do what you are told. Give me that weapon at once."

His touch, constraining, insolent as it was, forcing her in spite of all her resistance towards the door, excited her to very madness. He laughed, and bent down till his lips

touched her cheek; his hand was seeking hers to seize the knife, while at the same time he was still drawing her away with him, steadily, resistlessly. He bent yet closer, and said something in her ear in a whisper, with an insulting laugh. Then in an instant—a horrible instant of blinding passion—the steel had flashed through the air with a force born of the wildest fury—there was a cry, a curse, a groan, a backward stagger, and Philip lay at his wife's feet mortally wounded. For a second—but ah! how interminable was that second!—there was silence within that chamber of death. The everlasting boom of the waves, with their moan and lamentation, sounded loudly outside—the distant chant of many voices mourning.

"May you be damned!"

Philip gave a groan and tried to raise himself on his arm, but fell back helpless. He tried again, with a fiercer effort, and a smaller success. The blood was flowing fast from the wound. His eyes were blazing with fury and hatred indescribable. He gathered his forces for a dying curse.

"May the gallows spare you for a more hideous fate; may you suffer all that your soul most abhors; may you be the tool and chattel and plaything of men, may they drag you to the lowest depths of humiliation; may indignity be

heaped on indignity; may you be outcast, homeless, praying for death; may the pride of your soul be withered and utterly rooted out; may you die deserted in shame and misery; may your soul be damned for all eternity! The curse of the dying is said to avail much. May this curse stick to you and drag you down to hell, *Murderess!*"

His voice gave way and he sank back panting.

Almost at the same instant a man's step was heard in the passage outside. With a look of fury the wounded man struggled up for the last time, tried to utter some words—evidently of unspeakable passion—and fell back never to stir again. The footsteps stopped outside the door, which was thrown back upon its hinges, and Harry Lancaster entered the room. He paused abruptly, and there was a moment of dead silence. Viola was standing with head held high, the knife still in her hand, and in her eyes was a look that made the very heart stop beating. At her feet lay a human form, perfectly still, the white face upturned, one hand with the thumb pressed inwards conspicuous in the moonlight, which was tracing the outlines of the lozenge panes delicately upon the polished floor. Beside the prostrate figure was something glistening, something——

"Good God, what is it! What have you done?"

"Come and see," she answered, with a wild sort of

exultation. She went to him, put her arm in his, and drew him eagerly forward. It was a ghastly moment for him!

"You see I have killed him with this knife." She held it aloft, and then threw it on the floor.

"Oh! you are mad!" he exclaimed. "*You* have not done this! Let me look at you."

He turned her facing the full moonlight, and scanned the haggard features with an awful dread in his heart; yet almost a hope, so desperate was the crisis.

"Are you mad? Oh! tell me, are you mad, you poor tortured child?" he groaned.

"Mad? Oh no. I meant to do it. I knew it would kill him—I would do it again, I would do it again!" she cried in wild excitement. "I leave a life behind me so loathsome, so intolerable—— Yes," she broke off fiercely, "I would do it again."

"Oh! spare yourself! Have mercy on yourself."

"But it is true; it is the only thing that I can bear to let my thoughts rest upon, the only spot in my black life that is not black to me."

She held out her right hand and looked at it, moving it in the moonlight.

"Call me guilty; it is sweet to me—sweet and clean and wholesome! I am guilty; I have murdered him."

She drew an ecstatic breath.

Harry looked at her aghast. Say what she might, she was mad.

"His blood seems to wash away some of the blackness, the hideousness of the past—if that could be—but oh, no, no!"—(she thrust out her hands, shrinking back)—"nothing can do that; there are no words for it;—the horror is in my heart, and it burns there; it burns—it will never cease burning—never, never!"

She flung her arms over her head, and then sank cowering to the floor, leaning against the wall beneath the window, and always shrinking, shrinking, as if in a helpless effort to escape from herself. Harry gave a gesture of despair. The horror of the situation became more and more appalling the longer he thought of it. What was to be done? Viola's guilt must be discovered with daybreak, and meanwhile where was she to go? what was she to do? The blood-stained knife lay at his feet: his own thrice-accursed gift! He picked it up and flung it out of the window, whence it flew in a long curving line, quivering with the intense force of the impulse, away over the cliff-side and down down to the greedy waves below.

"Will you come with me instantly?" he said. "There is no time to lose, and I must save you."

"Save me?—save *me?*"

For an instant—a horrible instant—a flicker of repulsion passed across his face! The scene, the circumstance, the ghastliness of the doom, seemed to have overwhelmed him.

Suddenly, as if she had been struck, Viola shrank away with a half-articulate cry which rang echoing through the room and made the very heart stop beating, and a sickening chill run through the frame from head to foot. It was the cry of a spirit hurled from its last refuge, cut off from human pity and fellowship, cast out from the last sanctuary of human love.

With that momentary flash of repulsion and horror, a fathomless abyss seemed to open its jaws, black as the grave, but infinitely deeper than that resting-place of the weary who have lived and died uncursed. For these lay waiting a haven quiet and reposeful; but for her whose every breath had been cursed, who was stained and tainted through and through with shame and crime—for her was only a bottomless grave where she would fall and fall, weighted with her crime and her curse, through the darkness for ever and ever!

The words of passionate entreaty which Harry was now pouring out seemed to strike on deaf ears. The conviction

that the curse was to be fulfilled had already taken root, and it was fast becoming immovable.

"Viola, listen to me," cried Harry, grasping her hand; "rouse yourself and try to understand. Don't you realise that we must go away from here? I have just been explaining—only you did not seem to hear what I said—that we can put off in Caleb's boat, which lies about two miles on the farther side of the headland. The cliff is supposed to be inaccessible in that part, and so it was till a few days ago, when Caleb—but I will tell you about that afterwards; I want you to come away now, without more loss of time. Viola, Viola, do you hear me? I must save you."

"But I can't be saved," she said calmly, "don't you see? I am lost and cast out for ever; his curse is upon me; the hand of Fate is upon me. What earthly thing can save me?"

"Love can save you," he said.

"Love!—for *me!* Oh! you are speaking falsely; you are playing with me. I am not alive any longer. I have nothing to do any longer with human feelings and passions: I am dead. It is ghastly work playing with a dead woman!"

"O Viola, how can you torture me like this?"

"What do you mean? You shrink from me your-

self. I saw the look in your eyes, and I know what has happened."

"You are horribly deceiving yourself; but I have no time now to try to convince you—don't you understand that we must go?" he repeated hoarsely, "and that I would die for you?"

She gave a heart-broken cry, pressing his hand hard and close to her lips. Then she thrust it aside and turned away.

He darted after her.

"I must go alone," she said, without looking at him.

"You are quite mad! Where will you go to? What will you do? I must, I *will* go with you."

She shook her head. "That cannot be," she said. "You would see it yourself to-morrow. You think me mad, but I understand better than you do how things are. We stand facing one another to-night; but there is a deep gulf between us, and it will widen and widen, so that your voice cannot reach me—even now I hear it as a whisper; you will be cut off from me utterly and for ever. It is quite just and it is quite unalterable. We must bid one another farewell." She moved away, covering her face as she passed the motionless figure on the floor.

Harry let her close the door behind her; but after

waiting for a few seconds, to avoid her opposition, he followed her.

She had gone out by the side-door on to the terrace, and was hurrying, in the glimpses of the moon, along the narrow pathway that ran in and out by the winding cliff-side, and finally up to the distant headland and the ridge or hill on the highest point of the downs which marked from here the western horizon.

Though she moved swiftly, he overtook her almost at once. Hearing his step, she looked back and waved him peremptorily away. But he disobeyed her. "You must not come with me; *indeed* you must not. Do not let your life entangle itself further with mine. I implore—I entreat you to go back. Let me think, hope, believe that you are not involved in this fate and this curse."

"Viola, you don't know what love means. You don't understand that it can save and atone and protect from the direst curse that ever fell on human soul. In this black hour—which in truth *I* have brought upon you—am I to desert you? Can you ask it? It was all my fault, and you must let me save you."

"You would do this out of pity," said Viola, "out of self-accusation; you would ruin yourself to atone for all the love that you have showered upon me, all the risks that

you have run for me, all the opportunities that you have sacrificed for me. O Harry! do you not see that my one remaining hope and desire is to turn away from you the shadow of this doom?"

"But, my darling, we can turn away the shadow together. Whatever you think you ought to do in expiation, I will try and help you to do."

"Ah! but if you were with me I could not expiate my crime; I should live enjoying the fruits of it—no, no, nothing can undo, nothing, nothing—and if we had eternity to work in! Go back to your own life; we are parted now; no power can prevent it. My punishment is sure, whether it come from man or from God. Love itself cannot help me now: I am beyond salvation. I am a lost soul, and every effort at rescue only makes my punishment the harder. Your love, in spite of all, has been the best and sweetest thing in my life. Don't you see how it will be its crowning misery, if you force me to drag you down with me—if I have to think of myself to the last as your evil genius, who from beginning to end, has brought you sorrow and pain and misfortune? I have no faith and no hope; if ever a soul was lost, mine is that soul. Something within me seems to have frozen; I don't hope —I don't fear—and I don't repent." There was a strange

light in her eyes as she recalled the terrible scene in the death-chamber. Repentance seemed to be as far from her thoughts as hope itself.

"Whatever happens, I must come with you," said Harry doggedly.

"You might just as well take some creature out of her grave," said Viola. "I am dead; I am quite dead. The only thing that makes me alive again—through sheer anguish—is the terror that you will not leave me, that I shall yet bring some crowning misery upon you. If you have any pity for me, let me go!"

"But what will you do? Where will you take refuge?"

"No matter, no matter; only let me go!" and she moved on, signing to him not to follow.

Harry stood grief-stricken and desperate. His face was drawn and haggard almost beyond recognition. It was all his fault, all his fault! What in Heaven's name ought he to do? Should he let her go and return to take the punishment of her deed upon himself? If he did that, she would come back and give herself up; if he did not——

He saw her hastening away from him towards the distant headland, across the stretches of the downs, and his heart leapt up in wild rebellion against her decree of banishment.

It was more than man could endure. He would not endure it.

Swiftly as she was moving, he soon gained upon her, the sound of the sea and rising wind preventing her from hearing him until he stood before her and uttered her name. Then she gave a miserable cry and stopped abruptly.

"Viola, your command is unbearable. I cannot leave you. It is not pity, it is not remorse that moves me; it is love—sheer desperate undying love. I will share your fate, whatever it may be, and glory in it."

A quiver passed across her face, as if she were verging towards the realms of the living once more. But she shook her head.

"You think only of the moment; you don't foresee as I do."

"I do foresee, and I foresee a means of easy escape to-night, if only you will be reasonable, if only you will be merciful. Beyond that headland, beyond the ridge of the downs, there on the horizon, Caleb's boat—as I told you—is lying moored and ready for our flight."

"It is of no use; it is of no use," said Viola.

"It *is* of use," cried Harry, thinking she meant that

the proposed means of escape were hopeless. "Listen. Sibella and Caleb have arranged that the boat shall be waiting for us in that little inaccessible beach in order to avoid the risk of being seen or our means of flight suspected. Beyond that ridge you come abruptly—if you keep near the sea—to the western wall of the promontory, the place where the man rode over in the dusk and broke his neck. If we skirt the cliff close by that spot, and don't mind keeping pretty near the edge for another two miles—it is considered dangerous, for the cliff is breaking away in places, so we shall be absolutely secure from meeting anybody—if we take this slight risk we shall reach the boat in about twenty minutes, whereas we might take an hour to go round by the safer way. I am not a bit afraid if you trust yourself absolutely to my guidance. But this is not all (Viola, you *must* let me show you what our chances are before you reject them). Two miles along the coast, beyond the headland, Caleb discovered a part of the cliff which would have offered an easy descent had it not been for one steep little bit about midway, which was unscalable. It struck him that a few artificial steps cut in the rock would make it continuous with the slopes above and below, where one could scramble down without much difficulty. He made those few steps (Viola, hear me to the

end), and now we can descend by this way to the beach and put off to sea. Do you see how many advantages that gives us? Nobody but ourselves, Caleb and Sibella know of the possibility of getting to that beach from inland; the cliff is thought unscalable for miles in that direction; our means of escape, therefore, will never be suspected until some chance adventurer discovers Caleb's steps. The course that we shall take will be quite different from any that their calculations could lead them to expect. Long before morning we shall be out of sight, and we shall have landed on French shores before they think of pursuing us by sea. Sibella and I had formed careful plans for our guidance after we reached the opposite coast (you know that she was to help us and stand by us wherever we went), and these—but I must tell you about them afterwards—I have no doubt whatever that I could save you, if you would only trust yourself to me and do as I ask you. Every moment is of value; I do not feel safe till I have left the land behind me. Come, darling, come."

He put his arms round her to draw her away, but she resisted him.

"Viola, Viola, for my sake come." His voice shook with the passion of his pleading. "Remember how madly

I love you!" His lips were white and trembling, his eyes filled with tears.

She held her breath, wrestling with the might of the temptation to yield to his pleading, to seek rest and refuge in the eager arms encircling her, to lay her head on his breast and drift back to life once more, love-bestowed and tended. After the long conflict and self-suppression, after the gloom and grief and pain of her life, the thought of such surrender and protection was like heaven! The longing became so intense that she had to clench her hands and stand still and rigid in order to resist it. She must not, she *would* not yield to it; she must not, she *would* not inflict upon him this deadly injury. Murderess as she was, she had not the baseness to accept a joy, to seek to avert a punishment at his expense. There was no room for self-deception; it was as clear as noonday. It must not be. If she had to face the torture of wounding him now, when she must bid him farewell for ever, still the torture must be faced—even *his* torture, in order that he might be saved.

Harry was still desperately pleading, Viola with her hands clasped tightly, her eyes fixed on the clouds, resisting, refusing, entreating him to leave her.

"Don't look away from me like that, Viola!" he cried

wildly. "What have I done that you should treat me so? It will drive me mad!"

He fell at her knees sobbing. She steeled herself for the terrible moment.

"Good-bye! good-bye!"

In a moment she had darted from him, swift as an arrow. He sprang up and followed her along the cliff-side pathway. She was running with desperate haste, on and on towards the distant promontory. He was determined to keep her in sight whatever befell, though he thought it wise to seem to yield to her wish in the meantime. The moon was not yet high in the heavens, and the undulations and hollows of the downs cast great stretches of shadow, made yet more sombre by the groups of gorse-bushes, and here and there, farther inland where the slopes were more sheltered, by patches of wood and little wind-beaten copses.

What did Viola mean to do? Which direction would she choose? At present she was keeping along the edge of the cliff where the moonlight fell, as if bound for the distant ridge on the headland. She was in sight, and so far safe. But presently she must come to one of the great patches of shadow, and then a serious danger threatened. The shadows ran into one another, some

spreading inland, some towards the ridge, some back to the castle and the country about Upton.

When once she left the moonlit spaces, Harry would lose sight and knowledge of her unless he kept close beside her at the moment of her disappearing into the darkness. That peril must be avoided at all hazards.

His heart stood still at the thought of what might happen if he let her out of his sight. If she did not fling herself over the cliff, she might wander about the downs till morning, to be then hunted as a murderess and brought back for the hideous ordeal. She had no thought of evasion or self-protection.

He quickened his pace, till he was close enough to the fugitive to overtake her if necessary in a few seconds.

She seemed to become aware of his presence, for she turned and waved him franctically away. At a short distance ahead of them, crossing their path, lay the broad mass of shadow which Harry regarded with so much dread. He dared not obey her gesture; the risk was too great. When he came up to her she looked absolutely distraught.

"Now, Viola, I am coming with you," he said firmly; "you *shall* not keep me back. Realise that it is useless to attempt it."

In an instant she had gone up close to the cliff-side.

"If you advance a step beyond where you now stand," she said, "I throw myself over."

He stopped appalled.

They stood facing one another, between them the imaginary line upon the grass, stronger to oppose him, as Harry bitterly realised, than any fortress-wall. She stood on the very verge of the precipice, well out of his reach. His heart stood still for fear.

"Viola, you are pitiless as death!"

He heard her give a low sob as she moved swiftly away keeping always close to the cliff.

His voice called despairingly after her, "Viola, have mercy on me—let me come!"

"I cannot, I cannot—it is because I love you."

"I *must* come!" he cried wildly.

She pointed silently over the cliff without looking back. In another second she had plunged into the shadow, and he could see her no more.

The blackness did not fall upon the edge of the cliff, and therefore Harry knew that she had left the perilous verge, and that he might pursue her. But which way had she gone? What did she intend to do? She seemed to be possessed with a feverish haste to cut herself adrift, to

escape from the scene of so much misery. Hope sank within him as he ran on in desperate, clueless pursuit. The memory of her face and of her deed, her immovable firmness in spite of all his pleading, killed every vestige of it in his heart. It was almost worse than if she were mad. She was not mad—he had convinced himself of that; on the contrary, she was miserably sane, clear in her forecasts, in her grasp of the situation, in the certainty which she felt of hastening punishment. The notion of escape seemed to have no hold upon her; she would probably not deny her guilt if accused. Her one desire or necessity was to cut herself off from her fellow-creatures, even from those who would face all risks for her. She seemed to be thirsting for punishment, yet unrepentant.

Knowing that she had left the cliff's edge, Harry followed as swiftly as he could one band of shadow after another, faintly hoping to find the right one before Viola had time to evade him. But he could discover no traces of her. The shadows led away into the trackless downs and far into the country; it seemed hopeless to follow them at haphazard. All was dead and bleak and silent.

Surely she could not have gone back towards the castle or the village! That was the only shadowed route still unexplored. In the inland direction the quest seemed

absolutely futile. There were belts of trees and hedgerows and thick copses offering shelter,—besides that of the darkness,—for a dozen fugitives.

Harry went hopelessly on, looking on every side, listening and watching intently. The breaking of a twig, the stirring of a leaf, made his heart beat feverishly.

Time passed, and he saw no living creature, except occasionally a bird startled from its rest; heard no sound but the movement of the tree-tops and the never-ending murmur of the sea.

More than an hour had gone by in this heart-wearing search, and all in vain. Once, had he but known it, he passed quite close to Viola as she lay hiding in the outskirts of a large wood, well out of sight among the thick undergrowth. She had heard her pursuer's footsteps along the road, and crouched down till he should pass by. She heard him come up, look this side and that, pause and listen intently. She thought that he must hear the wild beating of her heart. She clenched her hands to prevent herself from crying out to him. Then she heard the footsteps pass on, and a voice through the trees came floating back to her in heart-broken entreaty, calling her name.

Her plan had succeeded admirably—absolutely; but oh, how mournful was the victory!

The sound of the footsteps, pausing at intervals and then going on again, was dying away now in the distance. She could just hear herself being called by the beloved voice for the last time.

"Viola, Viola!"

Then only the winds could be heard lamenting, and the trees whispering in sheltered tumult.

Viola flung herself on the carpet of dead leaves and broke into a passion of sobbing. The paroxysm, long and terrible, passed over at length, and left her lying still and exhausted at the foot of the old beech-tree where she had fallen. The wind, passing on its way through the wood, mourned over her. She rose at last, and pushed her way out. With one long, last look in the direction which Harry had taken, she turned again seawards, retracing her steps and hurrying back to the shelterless downs. She directed her steps—sometimes walking very quickly, sometimes breaking into a run—towards the headland and the ridge on the western horizon. A great sweep of moonlit down led up to it. Here were no shadows, for the land rose in a long series of gentle undulations to the height.

Across this wide space Viola was hastening when Harry, hopeless with the failure of his inland quest, returned once

more to seek her by the sea. He knew her love for it, and the fascination of its voice, and he thought that in this desperate hour it would perhaps lure her back to the cliff-side and the shore.

His conjecture proved true. When he descried the dim figure in the distance hurrying towards the headland, he gave a wild cry and raced madly after her, dazed with new hope and frantic with fear. Over the brow of that hill lay the western wall of the promontory, sheer and pitiless; would she remember and avoid it? Could he overtake and shield her from the peril? One thought brought relief to him: though the fatal cliff lay beyond the ridge, the boat lay beyond it also, and Viola knew of it. It seemed not improbable,—it was even likely that she would set herself adrift upon the waters, giving herself to the sea, and accepting without question its final inexorable verdict. Harry raced on.

A lost spirit indeed she looked, moving, unconscious of pursuit, across those bleak spaces, swiftly as if the west wind were driving her before it in scorn. Harry's speed was marvellous; the ground seemed to devour itself beneath his feet. And as he ran the stern, terrible words which Sibella had so often quoted were rhymically ringing, clear and hard as a peal of bells, in his memory, "But the goat on which the

lot for Azazel fell shall be presented alive before Jehovah, to make atonement with him, to let him go to Azazel in the wilderness." Reaching the brow of the hill, the figure turned to look for the last time on the scene which held so many memories.

The dark outline was revealed against the sky, motionless, alone.

What feelings were in her heart as her eyes rested upon that stretch of shadowed, wind-haunted country?

The old familiar moan came up on the gale from the sea. How did it strike upon her ear to-night? Did she remember that by to-morrow her name would be in everybody's mouth, scorned and execrated? Did she realise that the hand of every man—except one—would be against her; that she was homeless, well-nigh friendless, with a hideous ordeal threatening, and a terrible death?

"What have I done? Oh! what have I done?"

The last flicker of hope died out; not a spark remained; there was no possible redemption. Harry saw that she was indeed doomed by fate, by circumstance, by temperament; that she was beyond the reach of salvation, even as she had said. Love itself stretched out faithful arms in vain. She could not even repent.

In the sky a phalanx of black clouds had been marching

up stealthily from the west, so thick and heavy that the moonlight was threatened with extinction. Becoming suddenly aware of this danger, Harry darted forward in a panic. If the moon were covered before he saw which direction Viola had taken he would lose her again, and this time assuredly he would lose her for ever. He had to race the clouds. But he had no chance against them: he saw that clearly, with an awful pang of renewed despair, as he nevertheless put forth his utmost strength, and tore and strained, and struggled madly up the hill. The terrible effort seemed to rend him; he could not breathe; he was unable even to gasp; he felt rigid, paralysed. But he struggled on as one possessed. In a miraculously short time he had covered half of that inexorable space, but it was not within the power of man to reach the summit in the time. The strain was too much for him; he faltered, staggered, and half fell against the hillside; trying to drag himself up even then with his hands, his head spinning, a rush of blood filling his mouth. At that instant the solitary figure, with one last look over the moonlit country and the sea, with one glance upwards at the sky, passed over the brow of the hill and out of sight, while a second later the sombre procession swept over the face of the moon and plunged the whole landscape in darkness.

The scene was obliterated: darkness everywhere; over the interminable uplands, in their profound solitude, in the shrouded heavens, and over the sea: pitch-black, rayless, impenetrable darkness.

THE END.

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